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THE KING-PIN DETECTIVE;



OR, THE Red Water City Clean-Out.

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DICK TALBOT TALES," THE "JOE
PHENIX" ROMANCES, ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE NIGHT EXPRESS.

A WILDER and more desolate spot than
Gum Tree Watering Tank, on the Southern
Pacific Railway, a station east of Arizona's
flourishing city of Tucson, could hardly be
found along the whole line of the road.

"THIS IS MISS DIANA DAVENPORT, THE BOSS OF THESE HYER SHANTIES."

Yet all the trains stopped—were obliged to, for water.

There wasn't a sign of human habitation in the neighborhood, with the exception of the tank and a small cabin occupied by the two whose duty it was to look after the machinery of the tank-reservoir.

The midnight hour had come, and these two attendants were on the alert for the arrival of the Eastern Express train.

It was due a few minutes after eleven, but as it was usually an hour or so late the watchers did not wonder at the delay.

"She ought to be along pretty soon, now, unless she is later than usual," Billy Mack, the brown-bearded man in charge of the tank, remarked.

"Yes, I had an idea that I heard her a moment ago," Tom Johnson, his assistant, replied.

Then on the still air of the night came the distant whistle of the locomotive.

"There she is!" both cried, in a breath.

Then they peered through the gloom, anxious to get a view of the fiery eye of the iron horse, piercing the darkness.

The night was a dark one, for, although there was a young moon yet such dense clouds covered the sky that the light of the orb of night was almost totally obscured.

The track was as straight as an arrow for a couple of miles and as soon as the train turned the bend the watchers could distinguish the headlight.

The engine came on at full speed, with a rattle and a roar, as if anxious to make up her lost time; then slowed up at the water-tank.

The conductor, gray-bearded Frank Howard, one of the oldest and best men on the line, jumped off with his lantern on his arm.

"Be lively, boys, now!" he urged. "We are behind time and I am anxious to make up all I can between here and Tucson, for we have got a good stretch of road, and ought to do some fast running."

The men hurried to adjust the pipe.

Then, like so many phantoms, grim forms came out of the darkness, and surrounded the train.

"Hold up your hands!" was the stern command.

The trainmen, taken completely by surprise, were astounded.

The men were all masked, and in order to disguise their identity, had adopted the simple plan of wearing their coats inside out.

Two of them covered the engineer and fireman with their revolvers; two more held up the conductor and tank-tenders, and in the background were half a dozen more, apparently, but the night was so dark it was not possible for the assailed men to tell just how many there were of the road-raiders.

"Now, then, gentlemen, just understand that this is strictly business!" said the masked man who had previously spoken. "If you keep quiet, and do as you are told, no harm will come to you; but if any of you are foolish enough to cut up rusty, we'll send you across the range to the happy hunting-grounds so quick that you will never be able to tell how you got there."

"We are after the Express money, and you can bet your life we are going to have it, if it takes a leg; so come out of that cab, you engineer and fireman!"

"All five of you now waltz over to the back of the water tank, and if you dare to show your noses around the corner you will be fitted for a pine box so speedily it will make your head swim."

Under the circumstances to resist would have been madness, so the railway men obeyed.

Two of the outlaws kept guard over the party, while the outlaw leader and a powerful fellow, a regular giant of a man, approached the door of the Express car, while the rest distributed themselves on both sides of the train.

The giant was provided with a heavy sledge-hammer, and with a single terrific blow he crushed in the Express-car door.

Two blows followed the first and these almost completely demolished the door.

At the same moment the masked outlaws, who guarded the cars, opened fire, discharging their revolvers in the air and yelling like demons.

The startled passengers awoke in a hurry,

and it did not take them long to comprehend what was the matter.

In each coach were men who had been through this sort of thing before. They well understood what a "hold-up" meant and were quick to advise the other passengers to secrete their money and jewelry, so that the train-robbers would not find the valuables.

But, this gang were after the Express car only, and had no thought of troubling the passengers.

The chief desire was to keep the passengers and trainmen from coming to the assistance of the attacked Express-agent, and the volley of shots produced the desired effect, for there wasn't a soul on board the train willing to come out and fight the outlaws.

The Express-agent, Charles Bradstreet by name, had been sound asleep in his chair when the attack took place. He had had a long and hard day of it and so was completely tired out; but, the first smash on the door awoke the dreamer in a hurry.

Like all Wells, Fargo & Co.'s men, he went well armed, and immediately drew his revolver and opened fire through the shattered door upon the assailants.

The train-robbers without blazed away at the same moment, at the man inside, and had a decided advantage, for they were partially shielded by the darkness, while Bradstreet was in a lighted car.

So it happened that the shots of the plucky agent whistled harmlessly over the heads of the outlaws, but one of the bullets of the ruffians struck Bradstreet.

He threw up his hands, and, with a groan of pain, sunk to the floor.

"It is all right! He is done for!" the outlaw chief cried; "so be quick, boys! Jump into the car and tumble out the safe!"

All the details of the attack had evidently been carefully arranged, for two of the outlaws immediately climbing into the car, they quickly opened the door opposite the one where the attack had been made and tumbled out the safe.

To the Express-agent, lying prostrate on the floor, they paid not the least attention.

After the safe was thrown out they jumped from the car.

"The trick is done all right?" the outlaw leader asked.

"O. K.!" the big outlaw responded.

"Bring that gang from the back of the tank!" the chief then commanded.

The conductor, engineer and fireman, with the two tank-men, soon appeared.

"Now, then, old man, I reckon that as your iron horse has got all the water he needs, the quicker you pull out of this the better," the outlaw leader intimated. "You are away behind time, anyway, and if you don't make up some time between here and Tucson, you may get in trouble with headquarters, and that might cost you the loss of your train, you know!"

"Much obliged for your advice," the conductor responded, sarcastically.

Then, happening to look into the Express-car he caught sight of the messenger lying prostrate on the floor.

"My heavens! have you murdered Charlie Bradstreet?" the conductor cried, in horror.

"Oh, that was his name, eh—Charlie Bradstreet?"

"Well, we didn't have time to bother with introductions; I reckon he ain't dead, though—merely fainted on account of the excitement."

The railroad men glanced at each other, and then shook their heads; they feared the worst.

"But come! Jump aboard and pull out as soon as you can!" the outlaw commanded; "get a move on you!"

The railroad men had to obey; so engineer and fireman both resumed their position; the tank men swung aside the watering apparatus, and the conductor hastened to the first passenger coach where the brakemen were stealthily peering forth at the outlaws.

"All ready! Let her go!" the outlaw chief yelled.

The conductor gave the signal with his lantern; the engine gave the usual preliminary puffs; then the heavy wheels commenced to turn and away the train glided; out into the darkness of the night it went, with a rattle and roar.

CHAPTER II.

GETTING AT THE WEALTH.

As the train departed the outlaws fired a volley of shots in the air as a parting salutation.

It was an odd group, standing on the platform by the water-tank, as revealed by the lanterns of the two railroad employees—Mack and Johnson, both now looking with anxious eyes at the masked men.

The pair were anxious, for, helpless in the hands of the ruffians, they were uncertain as to what treatment might be in store for them.

There were four of the disguised outlaws, each and every one of them brandishing a revolver.

First, the outlaw chief, a man of about the medium height but broad-shouldered and heavily set, a sort of a cut-off giant, apparently.

Then the Hercules who seemed in the dim light to be about seven feet high—the man who had wielded the sledge in such an expert fashion.

Next, there was a tall, thin man, very thin indeed, who seemed to be even taller than the other.

And the fourth was a little short, fat fellow who seemed to be fully as broad as he was long.

For a good two minutes the outlaws watched the train, then going around a curve, until it disappeared from their sight.

"Good-by, old Iron Horse!" cried the leader, waving his revolver in the air. "I reckon we have got all we want out of you to-night."

Then he turned to the tank-tenders, who surveyed him with apprehension.

"Now, gentlemen, I reckon I will have to ask you to do me a favor," the outlaw chief said.

"It is your say so, and whatever you says goes!" Billy Mack assured promptly.

"Yes, sir-ee! No mistake about that," Tom Johnson assented with a grimace. "You have got us foul, so we have got to do as you say."

"Well, boys, you needn't be alarmed," the chief of the gang remarked. "We don't intend to trouble you if you do as we say."

"Don't you worry about that!" Billy Mack volunteered. "Just you spit out what you want us to do and you kin bet your bottom dollar that we'll do it right up to the handle."

"In the first place we want your lanterns," the outlaw leader announced.

"They are yours!" Billy Mack responded.

"Then I want you two galoots to waltz into your shebang and stay there for the next couple of hours without troubling your head about what goes on outside here."

"Easily enough done and we are just the two men to do it."

"No peeping now, mind!" the outlaw leader warned. "No leetle game of that kind. You are to go into your little shanty, get into your little beds, pull the blanket up over your ears, and try to persuade yourselves that this thing is all a dream."

"We understand, and you kin bet your life that we are not going to do anything to cause any unpleasantness," Billy Mack averred.

Then they placed the lanterns on the platform and hastened into their cabin which was just above the tank.

By this time all of the gang had assembled around the leader.

"I reckon these galoots know enough to understand that we will permit no foolishness," the outlaw leader remarked; "still, I s'pose it will be as well for us to keep an eye on them. So, Number Seven, just you take a position outside the shanty, and if you catch them trying any peeping just warm them with a shot."

"All right!" responded one of the masked men, and he immediately took a position in front of the shanty.

"Now then, let us see if we can cut open this little watermelon which Wells, Fargo and Co. have made us a present of without knowing it," the outlaw chief suggested.

Hoarse laughs came from beneath the masks of the disguised men; and taking the lanterns they proceeded to the safe, which, pitched out of the car without ceremony, had fallen on its back.

"Oho!" cried the leader of the gang, in delight. "The blamed thing is right in po-

sition for us! So, pitch into it, boys, and rip the thing open as soon as possible."

The gang were provided with the proper tools and a couple of them attacked the safe with a skill which showed that they were no novices at this sort of work.

With the heavy sledge they knocked the spindle off, and then inserted a heavy charge of powder.

The safe was just a common iron concern, such as are usually provided for railroad service, and was not calculated to resist any treatment of this kind.

The explosion of the powder ripped the door open, exposing the contents to the train robbers.

"Aha! that did the trick with neatness and dispatch!" the outlaw chief exclaimed.

"Now, boys, hold your lanterns and we will see how big a haul we have made!"

The men with the lanterns complied, and the leader of the gang "went for" the contents.

"Here is the ten thousand dollars of government money," as he took out a package and examined the inscription.

"This was intended for the paymaster to pay off the troops in the mountain department, but I fancy it will come in very handy for us, and Uncle Sam can send another ten thousand."

"The boys in blue will have to wait a little longer, but they are used to waiting and a couple of weeks more or less will not matter to them."

"There is ten thousand to the good, all right and we ought to get five or six thousand more from the regular Express."

But, the chief was disappointed in regard to this; the sum was a light one, only amounting to a trifle over a thousand dollars.

"Well, well, this is a decided set-back!" the outlaw leader protested. "If Wells-Fargo can't pan out better than this it ought to shut up shop."

The robber chief made a careful search of the safe, thinking that, in some secret nook, more wealth might be hidden.

He only had his labor for his pains, though.

"We have cleaned the thing out!" he announced.

"But, after all, I don't know as we have any right to complain. Eleven thousand dollars ain't so bad a haul, and I don't doubt the Express Company will think it has been skinned outright."

"There will be a lively row when that train gets to Tucson, and the railroad men will make the wire hot with the intelligence of this raid."

"There will be work ahead for our friend, Jim Peters, the jovial sheriff of Cochise county. He will have his posse out, and the boys will have a high old time in riding over the country trying to get on the track of the men who had the cheek to hold up the Pacific midnight Express."

"And how about the United States marshals?" asked the brawny fellow who had wielded the sledge. "As we have collared Uncle Sam's money, will not that bring them into the game?"

"Oh, yes; they will be in it, bigger'n a wolf!" the outlaw chief averred, with a laugh.

"The chances are ten to one, too, that the troops will be called out, and the cavalry will put in all their spare time on the job."

"It will be a mighty interesting game of follow my leader; but, I reckon we will be able to give them the slip."

"But now we must be off, boys! One of you take the lanterns over to the shanty and tell the galoots there to keep quiet for ten minutes; then they can do as they like."

The command was obeyed.

Then the outlaws seemed to melt away into the gloom, disappearing as silently and mysteriously as they had appeared.

The tank men waited for a good twenty minutes before they ventured out; then, with the aid of their lanterns they looked for traces of the road bandits.

The gang had ridden up to the station, of course, and the pair soon discovered where the horses had been tethered while the attack had been made.

"Here's a clue, but will the sheriff be able to follow it?" Billy Mack questioned.

CHAPTER III.

THE PURSUIT.

As the outlaw leader had anticipated, both the Expressmen and the United States officials were furious.

It had been years since so bold an outrage had been perpetrated, and all concerned swore that the robbers should be hunted down regardless of time, toil and expense.

The sheriff summoned his posse, the United States marshals mustered their men, while a most determined effort was made by the great Express Company, with its own corps of most accomplished detectives to trace out and identify the robbers.

But, right at the beginning the old heads among the trackers made the discovery that the man who had planned the robbery knew what he was about.

There were twelve men in the party, so the outlaw-hunters conjectured from the hoof-prints.

After leaving the station the trail went directly south, just as if the robbers intended to cross the border into Mexico.

A few miles to the south, though, where the main road leading from Red Water City and the mining-camps on the Santa Cruz River, and in the foot-hills in the Starita Mountains, joined the north road, by which access to the railroad was gained, the trail apparently split into three.

Of course when the fugitives got into the main, well-traveled road, it was an almost impossible matter for the most experienced tracker to "lift" their trail.

But, as far as the best judgment of the trackers went, at the junction, where there were four roads—the direct trail south, leading to Nogalis, the Mexican border town, the parallel road on the other side of the mountain range, going down the valley of the Santa Cruz, and the trail north to the railroad—the party separated.

Some kept on south, heading straight for Mexico; others went on down toward Red Water City, a flourishing town which had grown up in the northern shadows of the Starita mountains, while the rest turned abruptly north toward the railroad.

The pursuers had inquired of all they met in regard to the outlaw band; but, although it was a comparatively settled region, all the upper part being occupied by stock ranches, until the mining territory was reached, not a soul had seen anything of the midnight riders.

The pursuit was a complete failure; not the slightest trace of the robbers was gained, and, what rendered the mystery deeper was the fact that, in this particular region no gangs were known to exist who would be apt to commit a crime of this kind.

The inference, then, was, that some band which had been up to games of this sort in other localities, had invaded Cochise county.

"If strangers did the trick, and there were twelve of them, the odds are big that we will be able to spot some of them sooner or later," the sheriff decided, "because it will be a moral impossibility for such men with a thousand dollars in their grips to keep quiet; they will be sure to spree around, go in to run the town, and so give us a chance to hail 'em, but, of course if they have been keen enough to light out of the district, we will not be able to get at them."

Both the Express Company and the Government offered a large reward for the apprehension of the robbers, and, as an extra inducement, the officers of justice offered a free pardon to any member of the gang who should betray his associates.

Placards setting forth the conditions were printed and widely distributed; but the wise old sharps in the district gravely shook their heads, for the boldness of the operation, the manner in which the attack was planned, and the care which had been taken to avoid pursuit, convinced them that the outlaws knew exactly what they were about, and would not easily be trapped.

Whether murder was to be added to train robbery was a question, for poor Charley Bradstreet hovered between life and death.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PEDDLER.

It was a little after nine o'clock at night and everything in Red Water City was running "wide open."

This town was only about a year old but boasted nearly a thousand inhabitants, being so situated as to catch the trade of all the rich stock ranches to the north, and the flourishing little mining-camps of the Santa Cruz region to the south.

Every place of public resort had a goodly number of customers.

The principal hotel of the town was the Rising Sun, kept by a broad-shouldered Kentuckian who stood over six feet high—Colonel Daniel Boone he was called, and he claimed to be a direct descendant of the celebrated pioneer and hunter.

The Rising Sun was like the usual houses of its class in the Wild West; hotel, restaurant, saloon, and with a back room where a man could gamble to his heart's content.

Almost a dozen men were in the saloon, indulging in the gossip of the day, when a stranger entered.

He was a tall, lanky fellow of twenty-five, or thereabouts, dressed in the rough fashion common to the average miner.

Into the saloon he marched with the air of a man who owned the town.

Halting in the middle of the room, he gazed around him, while the rest suspended their conversation to watch his movements.

He wore a very solemn face, and cast his eyes over the inmates until he came to the big Kentuckian.

Then his face lighted up.

"I reckon that you are the boss of this hyer shanty, for sure!" he accosted, taking off his hat and making the colonel a polite bow.

"You are Kurnel Boone?"

"That is my handle!" the host responded.

"Allow me to have the pleasure of introducing myself," the new-comer remarked. "I am a stranger in this hyer town, but arter you once get acquainted with me I reckon you will say that I am one of the whitest men you ever struck. I am from Little Mud Creek."

"Ah, yes; that is a good locality to come from," the colonel reassured. "I know a good many good men down in the Little Mud Creek deestrick!"

"Kurnel, you do me proud!" and the lanky man made the Kentuckian another polite bow.

"But, you are right 'bout thar being a heap of good men down that way, and the Little Mud Creek deestrick is on the boom, now, for we are striking it rich thar, and the way the pilgrims are piling in to get a slice of the promised land is a sight."

"I am one of the lucky ones, kurnel, and me and my pard hit a ten-strike the other day for sure."

"My name is Perkins; Wellington Perkins was my handle before I struck this hyer deestrick, but my friends and neighbors thought that 'ar name was a little too rich for my blood and so they shortened it into Beanpole, for they all said I looked more like a beanpole than any man they ever struck."

There was a general laugh at this announcement.

"My pard has got a high-sounding name, too, and the galoots in the neighborhood altered it so quick that it made his head swim."

"George Washington Jones was his handle, but, seeing as how he is a short, kinder stumpy sort of a cuss, we all agreed that Bullhead Jones fitted him a heap sight better."

"Now then, gents, me and Bullhead have struck it rich in our mine, the Howling Swell claim;—we are taking over a hundred ducats a day; we are big men, you understand; we will be bloated millionaires in a mighty short time; so Bullhead and me reckoned that it would be about the proper caper for me to come to this hyer flourishing burg, Red Water City, and introduce myself."

"We are glad to see you, be gad!" the host exclaimed.

"Gentlemen, I want you all to waltz up to the bar and take a drink with me!" Beanpole insisted.

This invitation was responded to with alacrity by the majority of the occupants of the room, and the few who did not care particularly about drinking accepted the in-

vation, not being willing to offend the stranger.

Beanpole was already pretty well under the influence of the potent liquor, and as he took a big drink it made him disposed to be rather frisky in his clumsy way.

Just as the party turned from the bar a rather odd-looking man came into the saloon.

He was about the medium size, very poorly dressed, almost in rags, and his garments were darned and patched in a hundred places.

The man's face was a peculiar square one—a stolid face, almost devoid of expression.

A beard of a week's growth reared its stubble on his chin, and gave him a regular tramp-like appearance.

His hair was the oddest thing about him, for it was a dirty yellow in color, and being worn quite long, came streaming down from under his battered-up apology of a hat in a comical way.

In the Wild West, though, appearances count for little, and so no one in the saloon paid any particular attention to the newcomer, with the exception of Beanpole Perkins, who had got just about liquor enough on board to make him inclined to be "funny."

"Gents, and citizens, of this sweet-scented burg of Red Water City, I want to call your attention to a little article which I have here for sale," the new-comer remarked in a voice with so strong a nasal tone as to suggest that he was a native of Yankee land.

"You all know, gents, how mighty on-healthy this here climate is, at times," the man continued, as soon as he saw that he had got the attention of the crowd; "there are all sorts of fevers going 'round, like raging lions seeking who they can devour, and when a man is on his back with a fever where is he? Echo answers, gone up the spout!"

"Now then, gents, I have got a little fever mixture here which will ward off a fever attack every time. It is the best thing of the kind that ever was got up and I stand ready to give any man a hundred dollars who can prove that it isn't so."

This assurance coming from the poorly dressed fellow made the crowd laugh, but Beanpole Perkins's indignation was excited.

"A hundred dollars!" he cried. "Wot are you trying to give us, you walking rag-bag! I would be willing to bet a small fortune that you haven't a hundred cents, let alone dollars."

"Gentlemen, this here remedy is one of the greatest things that the world ever saw," the peddler went on, without paying the slightest attention to Perkins. "You have all heard of the Gila Monster, and I reckon that any man who knows anything about that reptile knows that it is one of the ugliest things the Lord ever let live. Of all the creeping, and crawling things in this 'ere world it is the hatefulest. The very sight of the beast is enough to make a strong man shiver, and its bite is death."

"But, gents, this 'ere fever mixture that I am willing to sell you for the small sum of a quarter a bottle is extracted from the blood and bones of the Gila Monster!"

"An Apache big medicine-man, over a hundred years old, puts up the stuff, just as his ancestors put it up before him for a thousand years or more."

"You never hear of these red bucks suffering from these mountain fevers! Not much! They have got this stuff and just as soon as they feel the fever coming on they take a dose of this 'ere invaluable remedy and away goes the fever in a twinkling."

"Now, gents, who will be the first man to try a bottle?"

Beanpole Perkins could restrain his impatience no longer.

"Say! you slab-sided galoot!" he exclaimed, shaking his fist at the peddler, "I reckon that you are the biggest fraud who ever struck this town!"

"Oh, no, no fraud at all, but good, square business, every time!" the peddler returned, not at all abashed by the outbreak. "This 'ere medicine of mine is a grand good thing! Children cry for it, grown people sigh for it, and the man who is wise hustles to get out his quarter as soon as he can! Who will have the first bottle and start the ball a-rolling?"

"Gila Monster be blowed!" Beanpole Perkins yelled. "You aint got no extract of Gila Monster, nor anything of the kind and I will bet a quarter on it!"

"My dear sir, don't risk your money for you would lose it to a moral certainty," the peddler averred, in a coaxing sort of a way; "better go down into your wallet and fetch out a quarter for to invest in this invaluable remedy, which is warranted to do just as I say or the money will be refunded and a handsome present given, besides."

The smooth speech did not mollify the miner; on the contrary it seemed to excite him, for, all of a sudden, he whipped out his revolver, cocked it, then leveled the weapon full at the peddler.

"Can you dance?" Perkins demanded, abruptly.

The peddler was game, for he did not shrink in the least, but gazed into the muzzle of the leveled revolver with the same placid, unmeaning smile which he had worn.

"Dance?" he echoed.

"That is what I said—dance and be hanged to you!" Perkins roared.

"Well, I don't set myself up for a professional dancer, you know," the peddler answered.

"Oh, that is all right!" the miner cried. "Nobody expected you to dance like a dancing-master, but you kin caper around just as if you were taking part in a shindig, you know."

"Yes, I presume I can."

"Well, then, Mister Gila Monster, I want you to dance for me!—dance, you understand, until I tell you to stop, or else I will fill you so full of holes that a skimmer would be a fool to you!" And in order to give due expression to the words, Beanpole Perkins shook his revolver at the other.

All within the room were watching the scene with intense interest.

The peddler did not seem at all alarmed, for the smile was still on his face.

"This is jest a leetle notion of yours?" he asked.

"Yes, blame you!" the miner roared. "But you have done talking enuff. Quit yer chin-music and sail in on the dance; and be quick, for I ain't over and above patient, and hate to be kept waiting!"

"Certainly, certainly! Anything to oblige!" the peddler responded in a cheerful way.

"I will strike in on a jig and then show you what I can do in the high-kicking line."

And, putting his hands together after the fashion of the Negro Juba dancers, the ragged rover executed a few jig steps, Beanpole Perkins nodding his head in time with the "music."

Just half a dozen steps; then, suddenly up went the peddler's right foot, dexterously kicking the revolver out of Perkins's hand, and sending the weapon flying through the air.

The pistol struck the wall and exploded, the bullet coming within an inch of Colonel Boone's head much to the Kentuckian's consternation.

Moving with astonishing quickness, the peddler grabbed Perkins by the shoulders, wheeled him around until he faced the door of the saloon, and with a series of lusty kicks, each one of which seemed to fairly raise the miner from the floor, the mendicant drove Perkins clear across the saloon and out through the door.

And the last kick was such a "h'ister" that it brought a howl of pain from Perkins as he vanished through the door.

The crowd roared with laughter.

For a man to set up to be a chief and then be so unceremoniously "called down" was a novelty.

After kicking the miner into the street the peddler turned and made a low bow to the laughing crowd.

"As you will observe, gentlemen, it is all done by the turn of the wrist!" he declared.

"Now then, gentlemen, who will be the first to buy a bottle of this wonderful Gila Monster Fever Remedy?"

"Hyer, by gad!" yelled Colonel Boone, going down into his pocket after his wealth.

"After this hyer exhibition of yours I will take a bottle if it cost a dollar!"

A dozen others followed the Kentuckian's example, and for a few minutes the peddler did a brisk business.

"Thank you, sir, thank you!" the medicine-

man said to each customer. "You are getting the worth of your money every time!"

Many were the compliments bestowed upon the peddler, but he was evidently a modest man for he said:

"It wasn't much of a job, for it was liquor that backed the shop up. If he had been a real big chief I never would have dared to try such a game."

At this point Perkins stuck his head in at the door.

"Say! kin I come in and git my gun if I don't go for to make any disturbance?" he asked, in a sheepish way.

"Certainly!" cried the colonel who had got the pistol; "come right in, my man; nobody has got anything against you."

Perkins came shambling into the saloon, got his revolver, then cast a look at the meek peddler with his ceaseless smile.

"You take the cake, you do!" the man from Red Water confessed. "Yes, sir-ee! I will be gol-darned if you don't take the hull entire bakery!"

"I have seen some men who looked soft but were the hardest kind of nuts, but I never run across such a cuss as you since I was hatched!"

And then Beanpole Perkins stalked away. "He means well, but he was never cut out for a fighting man," the peddler concluded.

"Well, gents, are your wants all supplied? Does anybody else want a bottle of this invaluable remedy?"

There were no more customers and as no one spoke the medicine-man thanked those who had purchased for their patronage.

"If anybody who hasn't bought concludes to buy you will be able to do so for I calculate to stay in this neighborhood for a couple of weeks," he announced, and with a low bow departed.

"That galoot has got sand, although he does put on such a mealy mouth!" the colonel declared.

CHAPTER V.

"I KNOW YOU!"

In the saloon, during this affair, was a slightly-built, undersized man, with a thin sallow face of an unpleasant expression.

He was called Thomas Thornton—better known perhaps as "English Tom," for he was a native of the "tight little island," speaking with a decided accent.

English Tom was a sport, of a "low-down" sort, though—one of these who act as decoys and play the jackal to the big sport's lion.

The Englishman was in the rear of the saloon when the peddler entered, and from the time he made his appearance until his departure Tom watched the man as a cat watches a mouse.

As soon as the medicine-seller departed the Englishman followed, slipping quietly out of the saloon so as not to attract any attention.

The peddler walked a short distance up the street and then halted as if uncertain about his movements.

English Tom hurried up to him.

"How are you, old man?" the Englishman saluted. "It is a blooming long time since I have seen you."

The mendicant surveyed the speaker and shook his head.

"Yes, it is a long time I think, for I don't remember to have ever met you before."

"Oh, yes, you have! I know you!" Tom insisted significantly.

"Perhaps you do," the peddler responded in his mild way. "I reckon I ain't got the best memory in the world for faces, and mebbe I have met you somewhere and forgot all about it."

"Fort Smith!" the Britisher suggested.

"Hey?"

"You were never there, I s'pose?"

"No, never!"

"Ah, gammon! What do you want to try to stuff me with a yarn like that? Tom demanded, angrily. "Do you take me for a blarsted blooming idiot?"

"Oh, no, certainly not," the peddler assured firmly.

"I s'pose you don't even know where Fort Smith is, hey?"

"Oh, yes; down in Arkansas; but I was never there."

"Ah, rot! I s'pose you don't know that there is a big United States prison at Fort Smith?"

"No; I do not!" emphatically.

"I say! what do you expect to make by playing a game of this sort?" Tom demanded, angrily. "You know well enough all about Fort Smith—you know the prison is there, too, for it is almost three years ago that I met you there."

"I was in quod for using a knife on a man who tried to do me up, and you were there for being mixed up in a bank robbery in Arkansas, and it was the general opinion that you were mixed up with one of the biggest gangs which had ever operated in the neighborhood."

The peddler shook his head, the placid smile yet on his face.

"My friend, you have made some mistake. I am not the man you take me to be at all," he insisted.

"Oh, bosh, gammon and rot!" English Tom retorted in evident disgust and anger. "What is the good of trying to pull the wool over my eyes in this sort of fashion?"

"I am not trying to deceive you in any way!" the peddler protested. "I say again, you have made a mistake. I may look like this man of whom you speak, but I surely am not he."

"I am a meek, lowly traveler in this vale of tears, going along in the quietest manner possible, and a-trying to do all the good I can to my fellow-man by selling them the most invaluable medicine—"

"Ah, stow that!" the Englishman interrupted angrily. "I don't want any more of that blooming nonsense. I say you are the man I met at Fort Smith, and no mistake."

"I disremember now just how you were called, but I do know the lads in the jail said that you were one of the biggest scoundrels that had ever come to Fort Smith."

"My name is Jeremiah Green, and anybody who knows me will tell you that I am one of the quietest and most inoffensive creatures to be found on this here footstool."

"Bosh, bosh, bosh! I know better, and now I will come right down to the bedrock at once. You are here for business, of course. That so, I am open for a deal; you will need a pal; I know this town from beginning to end and can put you up to the parties who have got wealth; so if we go in together we can make a good thing out of it."

"Oh, my friend, you have made such a mistake!" the peddler protested, with a melancholy shake of the head.

"You won't have it?" English Tom demanded, indignantly.

"I wouldn't do anything wrong for the world!"

"Good man! You think you are mighty smart, I s'pose, to throw over an old pal in this unhandsome way, but I will soon show you that it is you who have made the biggest kind of a mistake."

"If you won't have me for a friend, then I will show you that I can be the liveliest kind of an enemy."

"Oh, my dear friend, you are so wrong!"

"You thought you could sneak into this town and play this peddler racket without anybody being up to your little game."

"I'm not playing any game."

"I s'pose you have got a gang back of you and that is the reason why you won't do business with me."

"Mebbe you and your pals are the ones who robbed the Express?" the Englishman insinuated. "That is right in your line."

"It is no use to talk to you, so I will go," the peddler said with a trace of impatience, and he turned and went off the street.

English Tom watched him for a moment and shook his fist at the retreating form.

"If you won't have me for a pal blame me if I don't go in to do all I can to break up your blooming game."

"I will give the snap away to the sheriff. Jim Peters is just as smart as they make 'em and he will be mighty glad to have me put him up to the time of day!"

"Let me see! Where will I be apt to find Peters? In Dave Fox's Keno Palace?"

"Yes, I will be pretty certain to find him there at about this time of night. Then I will show this chap that he ain't half so blooming smart as he thinks he is!"

"I will give the office to Peters and the odds are big that if the sheriff once gets

started on the right track he will nail my cunning gentleman!"

Hungry for revenge English Tom started on his mission.

CHAPTER VI.

THE OFFICIALS.

DAVE FOX's Keno Palace was one of the popular places in Red Water City.

After nightfall if you wanted to see any prominent man in the town the odds were great that, if you seated yourself in the "Palace" the individual would be sure to drop in.

The sheriff was there, sitting in the part of the saloon by the bar, smoking a cigar and conversing with the mayor of the town, Benjamin Thompson.

There was a marked contrast between the two officials. Peters was rather undersized with a sallow face, red mustache and red hair, but he bore the reputation of being one of the quickest men on the "draw" in Arizona, and on a dozen different occasions he had given ample proof that he did not know the meaning of the word, fear.

The mayor was a big, burly person, with a long brown beard, and although a very popular man, yet there was a suspicion that "His Honor" was not "dead game," as to pluck—no such man as the sheriff, who possessed the unswerving courage of a bulldog—who, when he went into a quarrel, cared not whether he faced one man or a dozen.

English Tom was acquainted with both of the officials; and so, approaching without hesitation, said he had something of importance to communicate and asked for a private interview.

"We will step out on the street and go around to the back of the saloon," the sheriff said.

"Yes, we can talk there to our hearts' content without danger of being overheard," the mayor added.

The three proceeded to the rear of the saloon, and English Tom then explained about the peddler.

"Yes, I heard all the particulars of the affair," the sheriff announced, after the Englishman related how the peddler had treated the miner.

"Anybody could have upset Beanpole Perkins; there's no more fight in that galoot than there is in a Digger Injun."

"I know the man from A to Ampersand, and if he hadn't been full of whisky he never would have made such a fool of himself."

"I suppose you will be astonished, sheriff, when I tell you that this peddler has got sand enough to tackle any man in the town," the Englishman half queried.

"Yes, I should be, for from the description given of him I should think he was a quiet, harmless sort of fellow," Peter responded.

"Well, sheriff, only a little while ago this quiet man was confined in the United States prison at Fort Smith, and bore the reputation of one of the most dangerous criminals who had ever been there," averred the Briton.

"You don't say so!" exclaimed the mayor, in amazement, but the doubtful look on the face of the sheriff showed his incredulity.

"Are you sure that you have not made some mistake about this matter?" he asked.

"Nary a mistake!"

And then, at length, the Englishman related all the particulars of the affair.

"It doesn't seem, then, as if there could be any doubt about the matter," the mayor decided.

"Well, under the circumstances, Tom, you certainly ought to be able to know the man wherever you might meet him," the sheriff observed thoughtfully.

"Oh, yes; he is my blooming mutton; there is no two ways about that."

English Tom proceeded to state how he suspected that the assumed peddler had a hand in the Express robbery, and both officers were at once impressed with the idea.

"I say, Peters, I think this is a clue which will be worth following up," the mayor suggested.

"Yes, and I will attend to the matter!" the sheriff announced. "From the beginning I have thought that the robbery was the work of an organized gang—men up to

games of the sort, and who knew exactly how to go to work."

"It wasn't the work of any novices," the mayor assented; "that is certain. So I say, Tom, this is a very important piece of information you have given us, and if anything comes of it we will see that you receive a good slice of the reward."

"One important point is not to let Mister Jeremiah Green know that you have recognized him," the sheriff warned.

"Well, but I have let him know it!" admitted the Englishman in a deprecating way.

The officers looked disappointed.

"What did he say?" Peters asked.

"Oh he wouldn't have it so at all!" English Tom replied.

"Denied his identity?" the sheriff asked.

"Yes, outright; said I had made a great mistake and declared that he had never seen me before in his life."

"All right, let it go at that!" Peters advised. "If you run across him again go out of your way to tell him you are satisfied you made a mistake and that you now believe he is not the man you took him to be."

The Englishman said he would, and this ended the interview.

CHAPTER VII.

THE STAR OF THE KENO PALACE.

Just after the officials with English Tom left the Keno Palace two men came up the street, halted at the door of Dave Fox's celebrated saloon and took a look at the interior.

The pair were well dressed, although clad in the loose and easy style common to the far West, where "billed" shirts and "plug" hats are few and far between.

One of the two was young, of twenty-eight years or thereabouts, a tall, good looking man with regular features, lit up by dark brown eyes. This was a New Yorker, Lawrence Vandermiller by name.

His companion was a big, muscular fellow of forty, with weather-beaten features, a grizzled beard and long locks of the same hue.

Any one familiar with the wild West types of character would have set him down for a genuine mountain man, trapper, Indian-fighter, scout, prospector—a regular mountain nomad, yet one of the true heroes who have been the making of the West.

William Jackson was his name, but the men of the wilderness knew him far better as Hickory Bill—a man whose name stood second to none of the old mountain-men, in courage, skill and honesty.

The pair were evidently sight-seeing, and strangers to Red Water City.

"This seems to be a sort of a lively place, Bill," the New Yorker insinuated. "Suppose we take it in for a while."

"All right! A keno room is allers mighty interesting," Hickory Bill observed. "I reckon thar ain't a game a-go'in on top of this everlasting footstool which kin pull the average man in quicker."

"Somebody has got to win the pot every time; thar's no gitting 'round that, you know; the bank can't snoop in and scoop the cash, so every man jack who jines in the game reckons that his chance is just as good as the next man, seeing that somebody must win."

"Yes, it is a fascinating game to those who want to get money without having to work for it," Vandermiller assumed.

"But, pard, the bank comes in for its rake of ten per cent. of the pot every time, and that is whar the sport who runs the place gets in his fine work—ten per cent. every time, and nothing to pay out," Hickory Bill declared with a chuckle. "It is a sure enough cinch for the bank!"

The two entered the saloon, but hardly had they got within the portal when the New Yorker grasped Hickory Bill violently by the arm and exclaimed:

"Great heavens, Bill, do you see that woman?"

On one side of the saloon, at the front, was the bar, the keno-playing going on in the rear.

Upon the opposite side was a small cigar counter; beyond this counter was an upright piano, and behind the cigar counter sat a tall, handsome blonde woman.

She was young, not over twenty-five, was dressed in a neat, dark suit, and looked to be every bit a lady.

"Oh, yes, I have heard of her," the mountain-man replied. "Some of the boys down to the hotel was telling me about her, and said we must be sure to come in and take a squint."

"She is worth it, too, by the everlasting hills!" the scout added.

"I know her!" Vander Miller announced, evidently deeply agitated.

"You don't mean it?"

"Yes; I knew her in New York, years ago!"

"Waal, waal, that is strange!"

"But, I had lost sight of her for years, and I had no idea whether she was alive or dead."

"She is healthy enuff, I reckon."

"I must speak to her."

"Easy enuff! Go and buy a cigar and the thing is done."

"Wait here for me."

"All right."

As the New Yorker made his way to the cigar counter, the lady was looking in the opposite direction, and so did not see Vander Miller until he spoke.

"Katherine—Mrs. Montrose—is it possible that it can be you?" the New Yorker exclaimed.

The cigar counter being off to one side, away from where the crowd congregated, rendered it possible for a conversation to be carried on without much danger of its being overheard.

The woman turned quickly, looked the New Yorker in the face, and a slight flush came over her countenance.

"Yes, it is I, Katherine Montrose, just as surely as you are Lawrence Vander Miller," she replied.

"Great heavens, Katherine, you are the last person in the world whom I would expect to find in a place of this kind!"

"Yes, I suppose it does seem rather odd to you," she returned, with a mournful smile and a glance around.

"I cannot understand it!"

"It will not take me long to explain."

Then she pushed a stool out from under the end of the cigar counter.

"Help yourself to a seat," she said. "I reserve this stool for my especial favorites. When a gentleman comes along whose conversation is agreeable to me, and I feel like having a little chat, out comes the stool. It is your turn now; so be seated."

The New Yorker obeyed the injunction.

"Well, Katherine, I cannot get over my amazement at finding you in such a situation as this." The New Yorker repeated.

"It is rather odd, and my position is not much like the one which I occupied when you last saw me."

"Note the contrast!" she added in a reflective way.

"It is just about five years since we met for the first time. I was then a saleslady in a big New York drygoods house, and you were a clerk with the same concern."

"You did me the honor to fall in love with me, although you were hardly getting salary enough to support yourself, in a proper manner."

"You had great expectations, though, from a rich bachelor uncle after whom you were named."

"You were an honest fellow; and though you wanted me to engage myself, yet you did not attempt to make me do aught contrary to my inclinations."

"Then, along came Bob Montrose, who had just come in for a hundred thousand dollars. He wooed me and I was weak enough to sell myself to the man."

"I say sell, for that is the only word which fitly describes the transaction."

"I thought I had made myself safe for life; but, in three short years my husband got rid of every penny of his money, and a few months ago we drifted into this town. Here he fell sick and I was at my wits' end how to take care of him."

"By accident I heard that Mr. Fox here wanted some one to take charge of the cigar stand; so I applied for the position, and also said as an extra inducement that, if he wished, I would sing to his customers at intervals."

"It is the custom of all places of this

kind to provide some amusement for their patrons."

"I secured the place and thus was able to take care of my husband. But, he only lived a couple of weeks, and now I am a widow."

"This is my story."

"It is a most surprising one!" Vander Miller declared.

"Yes, it shows the ups and downs of this none too good world," the lady observed, in her peculiar cold way.

"Fortune has favored me," the New Yorker explained. "A year ago my uncle died and left me all his wealth, a couple of hundred thousand dollars, so I am comparatively independent."

"I congratulate you! I ought to have waited for you, eh; and not been in such a hurry?" and Katherine spoke cynically, that was evident.

"Well, Lawrence, strange as it may appear to you, I am not complaining of my lot. My position here is not an unpleasant one. I take care of this stand, and every evening, from eight to twelve, I sit down at the piano and sing for ten or fifteen minutes during each hour."

"I should not think that you could possibly stand such a life!" Vander Miller urged.

"Oh, there isn't anything so particularly disagreeable about it. As a rule, every one treats me well. Once in a while some drunken fellow may set out to make himself disagreeable, but, there are always plenty to show him that he must behave himself."

"I get a good salary—ample enough to support myself in comfort, and I could get married to-morrow if I chose to wed," and the woman laughed, a cold, heartless laugh, with little trace of merriment.

"I presume so, for you are an attractive woman—in fact, I think even more attractive than in the old days."

"Thank you! I am much obliged to you for your good opinion, the more so because I know it is no empty compliment on your part."

"Yes, I am quite a belle, here, in this wild town, and can count my lovers by the dozen—some of whom are desperate fellows in their love-making."

"I don't wonder at it," the New Yorker observed, in a rueful way.

"There are two gentlemen who think they stand particularly high in my favor," Katherine explained, speaking as though she really took but little interest in the matter; "the first is called Mortimer Claverhouse. He is an Englishman and the owner of a big ranch about ten miles to the north—Lone Pine ranch it is called, and it is reported to be one of the best stock places in the neighborhood."

"Claverhouse is one of the real, blue bloods—comes of one of the best families in England, but is a wild, reckless fellow, who acts on the spur of the moment, and cares no more for money than if it could be had for the asking."

"A sort of a black sheep, eh?"

"Yes, I should not be at all surprised if he had to leave England, for he is just the kind to get into all sorts of scrapes."

"I have met quite a number of Englishmen of that description," observed her listener.

"Well, this Claverhouse professes to entertain the highest regard for me, and declares that he stands ready to make me the mistress of the Lone Pine Ranch at a moment's notice."

"Evidently a devoted admirer," Vander Miller remarked, plainly not at all pleased.

"The offer is not a tempting one, though, considering the character of the man."

"Although he has a valuable ranch, those who are posted say he is making no money, owing to the lax way in which he manages, and to his drinking habits, and some of the gossips assert that he is so deeply in debt that he will never be able to get out."

"Not an encouraging prospect," the New Yorker remarked, his face lighting up.

"My other suitor is one of the best known men in the town, or in Arizona, I presume—Curly Masterton, and bears the reputation of being one of the greatest sports the West has ever known."

"I have heard of Masterton," Vander Miller admitted. "He is a gambler and bears

the reputation of having killed more men than he has fingers and toes."

"That is the man, and he is pleased to say that, if I will only marry him, he will make a veritable queen out of me."

"Katherine, it seems monstrous to me to hear you talk about receiving the attention of such men!" the New Yorker declared, with evident displeasure.

At which the woman laughed in her cynical way.

"You do not seem to understand, that in this country, both of these men are regarded as leading citizens."

"But, by the way, I did not think to ask before—but, what are you doing here? How comes it that you have paid a visit to Red Water City?"

"I am making a tour of the West," Vander Miller explained. "Having nothing particular to do this summer, I thought it would be a good idea to pass the time in seeing this section of the world. So I got a guide—an old mountain-man, Hickory Bill Jackson by name, and thus far have enjoyed the trip, but this encounter with you is a complete surprise."

"I do not doubt it."

"And, Katherine, let me take this opportunity for saying that my regard for you has not changed, and I would be as pleased now to make you my wife, as in the old time."

The New Yorker spoke earnestly, for his heart was in his words.

A troubled expression passed over the woman's fine face. She bent her eyes on the floor for a moment, then raised them and surveyed the young man with a sad look.

"I will be frank and honest with you," she said, "for you deserve to be treated in that way."

"I do not think I could bring myself to marry anybody after the experience which I have had with married life, so we will say no more about it."

"Then, too, if you should enter the lists as a suitor for my hand, you would soon find yourself in all sorts of trouble," Katherine continued.

"Masterton prides himself upon his renown as a warrior, and I have been told he has declared that he is going to make it warm for anybody who dares to pay me attention, so the gossips of the town are expecting that there will be a hostile meeting between Masterton and Claverhouse, for the Englishman is no coward."

"This is a dreadful state of affairs!" Vander Miller declared; "it is a strange situation for you, to say the least."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RIVALS.

Then Katherine happened to glance at the clock.

"Ah, it is nearly nine," she said. "Time for me to go to the piano, so you will have to excuse further conversation at present, and it is better that we should not converse together any more to-night, for it will be sure to excite talk."

"Come and see me at the hotel to-morrow. I board at the Rising Sun. Then we can have a good long chat. Good by!"

"Good-by!" and Vander Miller, rising, rejoined the old scout, while Katherine went to the piano, where for fifteen minutes she played and sung for the amusement of the patrons of the Keno Palace.

During her last song a well-dressed, good-looking, muscular man, a little above the medium size, strolled into the room, and as soon as he entered paid particular attention to the lady's singing. The man was an Englishman, and plainly showed his nationality, with his gray blue eyes, blond hair and peculiar little mutton-chop whiskers.

From his dress the New Yorker judged that he was a rancher, and as soon as Vander Miller caught sight of him the impression came that this was Claverhouse.

The guess was correct; it was the master of the Pine Tree Ranch.

When the lady left the piano and resumed her place at the cigar stand, Claverhouse accosted her, and the pair chatted for a few moments.

Then a man came up and drew the Englishman away to the bar, where they conversed upon a business matter.

While they were talking, into the Keno Palace came a man who would have attracted attention anywhere—tall and muscular, with a peculiar white face. His eyes were as dark as midnight, and his coal-black hair fell in long ringlets to his shoulders.

He was dressed in a black velvet suit, coat and pantaloons, no vest, and wore an elaborately ruffled shirt, in the bosom of which shone a large diamond stud.

This evidently was a first-class sport, and the New Yorker asked himself if this was not the other man who desired to wed the dashing Katherine Montrose.

Again, Vander Miller had guessed correctly. This was Curly Masterton, the hero of a hundred desperate adventures and encounters.

Masterton sauntered up to the bar, after making Katherine a polite bow.

He did not happen to notice the Englishman, although he was in his immediate neighborhood, until Claverhouse chanced to turn, and then the two men were face to face, not a yard separating them.

It was evidently an awkward moment for both, and for a moment they looked at each other, while the eyes of everybody in the immediate neighborhood were fixed upon them.

It had been rumored that there was likely to be trouble between the two if they came together and now here they were, face to face.

The gambler was the first to speak.

"If I haven't made any mistake this is Mr. Mortimer Claverhouse, of the Lone Pine Ranch."

"You are correct, I am the man," the Englishman replied.

"As I don't think I ever had the pleasure of making your acquaintance I suppose I shall have to introduce myself."

"It is hardly necessary," Claverhouse returned. "So prominent a man in the town can hardly fail to be known to everybody in it who amounts to anything. You are Curly Masterton, the sport."

The gambler bowed politely.

"You have hit my handle to a dot!" he declared.

"Now then, Mr. Claverhouse, I am one of the men who pride themselves upon coming directly to the point."

"A very good idea," the Englishman assented. "I proceed in that way myself."

"Very well, then; if I am not mistaken, circumstances have so adjusted affairs that you and I are somewhat in each other's way."

"Oh, no; I don't think that statement covers the case," Claverhouse remarked in a cool, indifferent manner; "it may be possible that I am in your way but I can assure you that you are not at all in mine."

Masterton wrinkled his brows, for this half contemptuous statement both annoyed and incensed him.

It had been the talk of the town as to whether the Englishman would have the courage to stand up to the notorious desperado, but it was apparent to all present that the master of the Lone Pine Ranch had just as much "sand" as the gambler.

"That is a point which may amount to something or nothing," retorted Masterton, an ugly glitter in his ebony eyes. "What I am coming to is that the impression has taken possession of me that the town is not big enough to hold both of us."

"Well, I am not competent to judge, as to that, for I can't tell how you feel about the matter. As far as I am concerned, there might be a dozen men in the town like yourself and I would not be troubled."

"We will come right down to business!" and Masterton now began the aggressive. "As this town is not big enough to hold both of us, one of us must leave, and as I have some business which will keep me here for a month or two, you will have to get out."

"Oh, will I? Well, I shall not go!"

"You understand the consequences of this refusal?" and Masterton's eyes now scintillated like those of an angry rattler.

"Really, I haven't troubled my mind to think about the matter," Claverhouse responded, in a peculiarly cool and insolent way.

"It means war!" the sport warned.

"Well, I don't pretend to be much of a

fighting man, but I am not at all afraid of war, as you call it."

"Are you heeled?" demanded the sport.

"Yes; I always carry my gun."

But, before either of the two could make an offensive movement, Big Dave Fox considered it necessary to take a hand in the game.

The owner of the Keno Palace whipped out a pair of revolvers with which he covered the pair.

"I rise to remark, and my language is plain, that if either one of you two attempt to pull a gun in this place, I will send that party to the happy hunting grounds by the fastest Lightning Express train that ever traveled the road."

The opponents looked at each other and then into the muzzles of the big six-shooters.

"I reckon this game is yours, Dave," Masterton remarked, with the air of a philosopher.

"Oh, yes, when a man talks such good sound sense everybody is obliged to listen," the rancher added.

"I want you to understand, gents, that as an individual I don't take any interest in this private matter of yours, but, as the proprietor of this hyer place I can't allow any shooting match to go on in hyer," Dave Fox averred.

"It costs money, gents, to fit up a place of this kind, and when a couple of men turn loose on each other with revolvers the bullets are mighty certain to do a great deal of damage."

"Another p'int: there are too many people in this room, and if you go to shooting, some innocent man who didn't take any interest in your quarrel will be sure to get hurt."

"Go out into the street! There's a heap of territory outside, and you can have all of it you want."

CHAPTER IX.

THE FIGHT.

BIG DAVE was plainly master of the situation, and the rivals made haste to acquiesce.

"As far as I am concerned the street suits me," Claverhouse announced.

"Out in the street then, it is," Masterton decided, promptly; "but, as it happens, I am only carrying a single revolver to-night, and have no extra cartridges."

"My own case exactly," the Englishman assured.

"We are evenly matched, then, and neither one of us has cause to complain. I will go out into the street and take a position in the middle of it, a hundred feet down. A minute later you make your appearance and the fun can begin."

"I am agreeable," Claverhouse assented.

"I am off then!" and Masterton departed, first making a low bow to Katherine Montrose.

From where the woman sat at the cigar-stand she could not only command a view of the two men, but could also hear every word spoken.

No particular sign of interest appeared on her marble-like face, though. She watched the men, seemingly, with as indifferent an air, as though having no interest in the matter.

Curious eyes were fixed on her face, for everybody in the room understood that it was about her the men had quarreled.

After Masterton had left Claverhouse drew out his revolver and clicked the cylinder around so as to be sure that the tool was in good working order; then he, likewise, bowed to Katherine Montrose and followed the gambler into the street.

As it happened there was a bright moon, so the street was quite light enough for an encounter.

Curly Masterton stood in the center of the thoroughfare, a hundred feet away, revolver in hand.

Claverhouse marched out into the middle of the highway, while the excited crowd of observers sought secure positions from which to witness the fight without the danger of stopping a stray bullet.

"Now then, Mr. Claverhouse, are you all ready?" Masterton asked with elaborate politeness.

"All ready!"

The opponents slowly and warily approached, for at a hundred feet there was not much chance for the little guns to do good work in the uncertain light.

Neither one fired until they had come within seventy feet; then Masterton took deliberate aim and blazed away.

Claverhouse followed suit immediately, but both missed, neither bullet going within a foot of the mark.

"Well! well! we are champion revolver-shots!" exclaimed the gambler, in disgust, and again advancing.

At fifty feet the duelists fired again, but, as before, no harm was done.

"Oh, hang it all, this will never do!" fretted the sport, and suiting action to the words Masterton advanced rapidly.

Shot succeeded shot in quick succession until both revolvers were empty and, strange to say, neither of the duelists had sustained any material damage.

Curly had the skin of the fleshy part of the left arm broken by a bullet, only a mere scratch though, while the Englishman's ear was nipped by a ball.

The two stood within twenty feet of each other with smoking but useless weapons in their hands.

A more unsatisfactory fight the citizens of Red Water City had never seen, and yet, Curly Masterton was renowned for his skill as a pistol-shot, while the master of the Lone Pine Ranch bore the reputation of being an extra good marksman.

"Let us throw the revolvers at each other," the gambler suggested. "Maybe we will be able to do some damage in that way."

"You are after satisfaction, ain't you?" Claverhouse asked, abruptly.

"Yes."

"Well, then, suppose we try a few rounds after the Marquis of Queensberry fashion?" the rancher suggested. "That will give us an opportunity to work off a little of our bad blood."

"I am your man!" Masterton immediately assented, as if delighted.

The gambler rather prided himself upon his abilities as a fist fighter, although it was but seldom he did anything of the sort, for his quarrels were invariably settled by the revolver.

The citizens now came forward and formed a ring around the combatants. This sort of fun was just to their liking.

Timekeepers and a referee were chosen, and, in a few minutes, the pair set at it.

In muscular proportion the Englishman, apparently, did not possess any advantage over his antagonist, but, before the men had sparred a minute, those in the crowd who were judges of boxing saw that Claverhouse was by far the better at this sort of game.

For fully a minute neither man struck a blow, each one endeavoring to "draw out" his opponent; then the Briton, having taken the measure of his man, suddenly banged the gambler in the jaw with his right fist and followed it up with a breast stroke which made the gambler grunt. Greatly incensed by these blows, Masterton rushed at the rancher like a wild bull, only to receive some "upper cuts" which made him see stars.

The gambler clinched, to avoid receiving any more such hits, then, forgetting the rules of the game, endeavored to throw the Englishman.

"Break, break!" yelled the referee and timekeepers, dancing around in wild excitement.

"No wrestling—'tain't fair!" cried the bystanders.

But, Masterton was so furious at the severe punishment he had received that he gave no heed to the cries or commands, but went in to do his best to throw the Englishman.

Under such circumstances Claverhouse was obliged, of course, to meet the gambler at his own game, as he was well qualified to do, for the rancher had been counted both a champion boxer and wrestler among the men of his college where he had been educated.

And so, in some mysterious way, no one of the eager bystanders could tell how, Claverhouse got a grip on his opponent, lifted him clear off his feet and dashed him to the earth with terrible force.

The lookers-on yelled, for few of them had ever seen such a trick before.

Some of the gambler's friends hurried to his assistance, for the sport lay groaning upon the ground, evidently badly hurt.

"A doctor, a doctor!" was the cry.

CHAPTER X.

THE GAMBLER'S PLATFORM.

THE doctor was one of the witnesses to the contest. He was a red-headed, middle-aged Irishman, Patrick Sullivan by name, a competent medical practitioner, but so dissipated as to render him a very uncertain quantity in practice.

If Paddy Sullivan was sober, or even only two-thirds "full," he was all right, but, once let him get thoroughly drunk and he was a perfect fool.

On this occasion, Paddy was all right, and he immediately proceeded to make an examination of the fallen man.

"Ha, hum! Well, really, Mr. Masterton, I am afraid your arm is broken."

"Yes, that's what I think, for it hurts like blazes," the sport responded, with a groan.

"It doubled under you as you fell and that is how the accident happened," the doctor explained. "Now then, the quicker you get into the hotel and into a bed the better."

The gambler was assisted to rise, and as soon as he got on his feet he said to Claverhouse:

"As soon as the doctor gets through dressing my arm I would like to have a few words with you in my room."

"Certainly; I will come," the Englishman assured.

Into the hotel went the [discomfited] sport. He was put to bed at once, and the doctor proceeded to set the arm.

"It is not a bad fracture—'tis a pity it is the right arm, though. Never mind! Inside of a month, it will be as good as new," the doctor assured, as he completed his work.

"Much obliged. A little thing like this is annoying, but in this world a man has got to take things as they come, and it doesn't do any good to kick, either."

Then Masterton requested that Claverhouse should be invited to come in, and when the rancher made his appearance the gambler asked those in the room to retire, as he wished to speak to the Englishman in private.

When the two were alone the gambler requested the rancher to help himself to a chair.

Claverhouse complied, and then Masterton said:

"Well, the game was yours to-night; you may be said to have made a clean sweep."

"Yes, luck favored me."

"Well, luck had something to do with the revolver business, but when it came to the fistcuffs there wasn't any luck about it, for you are a far better man than I, and the longer I kept at it the worse I would have been punished."

"Well, no ordinary man can stand up against me in a boxing-match," the Englishman admitted.

"I suppose I did play it rather low down on you in proposing the encounter, still all is fair in war."

"Oh, I am not complaining. But, now, let us get right down to the heart of this business. Are you determined to marry Katherine Montrose, if you can get her?"

"Yes; that certainly is my wish and purpose."

"And as I am equally determined to have the woman if I can get her, it is evident that we can't come to any friendly arrangement."

"I do not think that is possible."

"Of course, then, we will have to renew this little picnic after I get well; but I now give you my assurance that, until I do get well, you need not apprehend any trouble from me or my friends. I always play a straight open and above-board game; that is my platform every time."

"But when I get well we will take up this quarrel again. I will give you ample notice so that you can be on your guard."

"You are a good, square man, Masterton!" the Englishman exclaimed, impulsively, "and I am sorry that circumstances render it impossible for us to be friends."

"I will tell you, frankly, that this woman

has tangled up my wits as no woman ever did before. I am not sure, of course, that I can win her, but if I fail it will not be for the want of trying."

"She is a siren, and no mistake!" the gambler averred in a thoughtful way. "And, maybe, we would both of us be better off if we had never seen her."

"Possibly; but these things are all in a lifetime; it is fate, I suppose."

"That is all I wanted to say. While I am laid up the quarrel stops; when I get out we will take it up to a finality."

"Very well; I am agreeable."

Then Claverhouse departed.

"Yes, she is a siren and she may bring death to both of us," he muttered as he descended the stairs.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SHERIFF TRIES HIS HAND.

IT is a week from the time when the events related in our last chapters occurred.

During this time the sheriff, shrewd and wily Jim Peters, had kept his eye on the peddler; but, as far as he could see there wasn't anything out of the way or suspicious in his movements.

He traveled around the town, peddling his medicine, and seemingly attending strictly to his own business.

The man had managed to hire a bunk in the cabin of a good-natured Irishman for a small sum just as a man in his position would be apt to do.

The sheriff had again interviewed English Tom, and that worthy was so certain he had made no mistake in regard to the identity of the peddler with the desperate leader of a desperate gang, whom he had met at the Fort Smith prison, that the official was puzzled.

The sheriff at last came to the conclusion that it wouldn't do any harm for him to have an interview with the peddler.

"Let me have a talk with him, and unless he is an extraordinary clever rascal I think I will be able to detect whether he is playing a part or not."

So Peters requested one of his satellites to tell the peddler he wanted to see him about his medicine.

As soon as the notice was given the peddler came immediately to the sheriff's office.

"Take a chair, old man; I want to talk to you about this medicine that you were peddling. The doctor, you know, says that it is all a blamed humbug."

The peddler smiled in his meek way.

"Ah, well, it is the old saying I suppose, two of a trade seldom agree."

"Regular doctors, you know, don't believe in patent medicines, and this cordial of mine comes under that head."

"But is it so that it is an extract of Gila Monster?" the sheriff asked, evidently incredulous.

"That is what the old Apache medicine-man from whom I get the medicine, says, and I have no reason to doubt his word, for he is as square an old red-skin as I ever struck."

"I am troubled sometimes by breakbone or mountain fever; how does it work with a sickness of that kind?"

"If you will take it promptly it will break it up every time!" the peddler declared.

"I reckon you can give me a bottle," the official remarked, handing the peddler a quarter.

"You will find that you are getting a grand good article," the peddler observed as he gave the sheriff the vial of medicine.

"By the way, this is your first visit to this section, isn't it? I don't remember to have ever seen you before."

"Yes, it is the first time I was ever here."

"How do you do—go through the country on foot peddling from town to town?"

"Yes, I always trust to Shank's mare."

"Well, a man leading a life of that kind ought to be on to snuff."

"I manage to get along and make a living, for which I am duly thankful."

"I have met a good many of you peddlers and I never run across one yet that wasn't a pretty smart fellow; traveling around seems to sharpen up their wits."

"Well, I don't know about that—I don't think I am extra sharp," the man replied in his humble way.

"Ah, you don't do yourself justice!" the sheriff declared. "The way in which you handled Beanpole Perkins showed that you had plenty of good stuff in you, for, though the miner is generally a harmless fellow enough, yet he had been drinking and was inclined to be ugly, and as you were a stranger in the town he might have been one of the most desperate men in it for all you know."

"Yes, I know that. I had to take my chances."

"A man traveling around as you do ought to pick up a deal of information, if he keeps his eyes and ears open."

"Oh, yes."

"I suppose you have heard a deal of talk about this Express robbery the other night?"

"Yes, everybody is talking about it."

"It is one of the biggest operations which ever took place in this section, and the best thief-takers are at fault."

"I reckon that I don't take a back seat in shrewdness to the average man, but this hyer thing has got me."

"There doesn't seem to be any clue to the men who did the job," the medicine-man observed.

"Some people hold that the game was pulled off by a regular organized band of train robbers who came into this section for the express purpose of holding up this particular train, and then after the trick was worked they scooted for parts unknown as soon as possible."

The peddler nodded.

"But the mystery is how a band of eight, ten, or a dozen horsemen managed to make their way through the country without exciting any attention or being seen by anybody."

"Yes, it does seem strange."

"I suppose the most of people don't believe that the game could be worked?"

"No, I hav'n't met many who took much stock in the foreign gang theory."

"They think that the trick was done by some party right in this neighborhood."

"If that is the case some one of the gang is sure to make a break sooner or later."

"Say! why wouldn't it be a good speculation for you to see if you couldn't get on the track of these rascals?" the sheriff asked, abruptly.

"There's a big reward offered, you know, and if you could happen to strike in on the right parties you could make a big thing out of it."

"A man like you, you know, could go snooping around the country without anybody suspecting that you were up to any game."

"Suppose you try it now, and if you can get me any information I will pay a good price for it."

"I will be glad to do it, but I am afraid that I will not make much of a fist out of it."

"You can try, anyway."

The peddler said he would, and then departed.

The sheriff shook his head as he watched the man proceed down the street.

"I reckon there ain't anything out of the way with him, and English Tom has made a mistake in thinking that he is the leader of a gang."

The sheriff's meditations were interrupted by the entrance of one of the notable men of the town.

This was Isaac Solomons, who kept the largest store in the place—a middle-aged Jew, with a bushy black beard and a soft and wheedling way with him.

In addition to his store, Solomons also did a little banking business—that is, he loaned money on good security and was always ready for a trade provided he could make a good per-cent out of it.

"Good-morning, Mister Peters! How do you find yourself this morning, hey?" the Jew asked, beaming on the sheriff as though he was the dearest friend he had in the world.

"Oh, I am about the same as ever; how are you?"

"I vas as fine as silk! I hafe come to talk to you about a leetle business matter."

"Take a chair and fire away."

Solomons seated himself.

"I have a claim against Mister Mortimer Claverhouse of the Lone Pine Ranch for two

thousand dollars principal, and two hundred dollars interest.

The sheriff shook his head.

"Claverhouse is broke, they say, and if that is the truth I fancy you will have considerable difficulty in collecting the money."

"Oh, I have security!" Solomons explained.

"That is a different matter, then, for if your claim wasn't secured I don't believe you could collect a cent."

"It is a matter of common report that the Englishman has been running behind for some time, although I heard it said that he had some extra good cattle this year, and men who are posted in regard to the business said that if he handled the thing in the right way he would be apt to pull up."

"I have done a good deal of business with Mister Claverhouse and have always found him a good square man, so when he wanted this two thousand I let him have it, and for security I have a bill of sale of all the live stock on his ranch."

"Well, well, you certainly have got security enough for the cash!" the sheriff declared with a whistle of astonishment.

The Jew grinned.

"Ah, well, my dear Mister Peters, as a business man I must look out for myself," Solomons declared.

"You certainly drove a mighty steep bargain this time."

"The money was due yesterday, but Claverhouse did not show up with it, and some friends of mine, who would like to wrong me a little—you understand how good friends will sometimes take a delight in acting in that way—well, they say that I will not be able to get hold of the live stock."

"They say that when I go after my money, and if it is not forthcoming, endeavor to take the live stock, the cowboys will not have it."

"They will show fight and I will not be able to do anything."

"There may be something in that," Jim Peters responded, thoughtfully.

The Jew immediately became alarmed.

"Mine gootness, Mister Peters, do you really think there is any danger that I will not be able to get at the live stock?"

"Oh, no; I didn't say that. What I meant was that there might be some trouble in collecting in case the cowboys showed fight."

"But I don't think Claverhouse would try a game of that kind for it could only result in breaking him up entirely."

"He has never been mixed up in any rows, and I think he has a very decent lot of men on his ranch who could not be counted upon to resist the law."

"Ah, my dear Mister Peters, you have taken a weight from my mind," the old Jew declared.

"Would you mind taking charge of this business for me?"

"Oh, no."

"You will have to take a *posse* with you, I suppose, so that in case there is any trouble you will be able to back up your demand."

"Yes, yes; in all cases of this kind it is always wise to go prepared for the worst."

"It will be rather expensive, though, for you, you understand," the sheriff warned, "for I have got to have a fighting *posse* with me, and men who are willing to risk their lives cost money."

"Ah, well, I cannot help that," Solomons responded with a sigh. "I don't want to spend any more money than I can help, but the necessary expenses must be met."

"When do you want me to go?"

"As soon as possible."

"This afternoon?"

"If you can arrange it."

"Oh, yes, there will not be any trouble about that," the sheriff assured.

"It will only take me an hour or so to pick up my men, and as a rule I know just where to put my hands on them."

"Will you have to carry a big force?" the old Jew asked.

Jim Peters smiled; he understood what Solomons was thinking about.

"No; a half a dozen, including myself will be amply sufficient to do the trick, I think. Six men, well-armed, with plenty of sand, and the law on their side can fight a small army."

"Of course, I do not grudge any neces-

sary expense, but I would like to have you make the job cost as little as possible."

"You know, my goot Mister Peters, that I always give you any work of this kind that I have."

"That is all right! I will make the charges as light as possible."

"I will go after my men at once, and you take your papers to Judge John MacKelway and have him fix out the necessary legal documents."

"We must have everything all right and straight, you understand, before we can go ahead."

"Mine gootness, yes!" Solomons exclaimed. "I will attend to that all right."

"Have everything ready for me by twelve o'clock so I can start right after dinner."

"I will! I will go and attend to the matter at once," and the Israelite took his leave, while Peters went to a small hotel a little way down the street where his deputy, Big Dave Hagerman, usually spent his idle hours.

The Flush Hotel the house was named, and it was a great resort for the sports of the town who did not bear the best of reputations.

Hagerman said he would have the men ready by twelve-thirty for the road.

CHAPTER XII.

AN ADVANCE IN FORCE.

It was arranged that the men were to meet at a certain point a mile out of the town on the northern trail, and instructions were given for the men to go to the place of rendezvous single.

If Jim Peters had ridden through the streets of Red Water City at high noon with five well-armed men at his back he never could have got out of the town without being followed by a crowd, eager to see what was going on.

By arranging the matter in this way though no one was the wiser.

The *posse* was a carefully selected one.

The moral character of the men would hardly have passed muster, for included in the force were some of the biggest blackguards in the town.

They were men of sand though, who could be depended upon to put up a good fight provided they were sure that their efforts would be well rewarded.

Lone Pine Ranch was a trifle over ten miles from Red Water City and as the "army" had good horses it did not take them long to cover the distance.

The ranch was situated on a little creek which ran down into the Santa Cruz River.

The cowboys were busy getting ready a bunch of cattle for market when the sheriff's party arrived.

As Jim Peters had said, they were a good lot of men, and it did not appear probable that they could be induced to resist the officers of the law in the discharge of their duty.

Claverhouse was in the ranch when the party arrived, and came out with a look of surprise when he noted the sheriff with an armed force at his back.

"I reckon he don't mean to fight," the sheriff muttered to himself as he saw that everything about the ranch was progressing as usual.

"Men who meditate resistance prepare for trouble."

"How are you, Mr. Claverhouse? I've got a little business with you."

"Yes? What is it?"

"A claim of Dave Solomons."

The Englishman burst into a loud laugh.

"Well, well, you don't mean to say that the old man has got anxious and called upon the law?"

"Yes, you see the claim was due yesterday and as you didn't show up with the cash he got the idea into his head that there was going to be trouble."

"The old man ought to have know me well enough not to have thought in that way."

"Then some good-natured friends have been stringing the old cuss, you see, telling him that when he came to take the live stock he would find you and an army of cowboys ready to fight."

"It doesn't look much like that, eh,

sheriff?" Claverhouse suggested, with a quiet smile as he glanced around.

"No; the only signs of war I see is my gang here."

"The old man need not have been alarmed. I have got his money and intended to bring it in to him to-night."

"I had it yesterday noon, but as I was busy I put off going to the city until to-day, not having the least idea that Solomons would get rattled about the matter. Why on earth didn't the man ride out and see me before he went to all this trouble?"

"Because some fool friends of his succeeded in scaring the life almost out of him with this talk that you couldn't pay and there would be a fight."

"It is utterly ridiculous!" the Englishman exclaimed.

"The way the papers were drawn out he had me hand and foot, and if I had attempted to resist I would only have brought ruin upon myself."

"I tried to tell him that, but he wouldn't listen to reason."

"When one of these Jews gets started, and they think they are going to lose money, they are apt to be unreasonable. But, light down, sheriff. Come into the ranch and I will pay over the cash."

Peters complied with the request and the transaction was soon completed.

"I told the old man when I got the money that I had a dead sure thing to make a good deal with it," Claverhouse explained. "There wasn't any speculation about the matter. I know, though, that certain parties, who didn't like me, have gone out of their way to circulate reports that I am in financial difficulties; but, sheriff, I reckon my ranch is paying just about as well as any of the places of the same size in the country."

"I am just waiting to get a good chance at one of these talkers, and if I don't make him eat his words it will be because he is a better man than I am."

"Well, Claverhouse, after that little exhibition of yours the other night with Curly Masterton I reckon there ain't many men in Red Water City who would be anxious to lock horns with you," Peters assumed.

"Yes, I succeeded in holding my own," the rancher admitted, smilingly.

"Well, I should say so! So-long!" And the *posse* departed.

CHAPTER XIII.

A NOVEL PROCEEDING.

OF course a transaction like this mission of the sheriff could not be kept quiet, and in an hour after the *posse* arrived in Red Water City, about everybody in the town knew all the particulars of the affair.

The credit of Claverhouse immediately advanced a hundred per cent, and there were plenty of men now ready to declare that they always knew the rancher was all right.

He might be a little pushed for money at times, but where was the rancher who was not?

And if he was an inveterate gambler the odds were great that he won as much money as he lost, so that fact did not affect his prosperity.

Old Solomons was disgusted.

The sheriff's bill was a heavy one; as he had said, a *posse* of this kind cost money.

"If I had only waited I would have got the cash!" he exclaimed, with a wry face, as he paid the sheriff.

"I was the biggest kind of jackass to listen to them fool talkers."

"Yes, you were a little hasty," Peters opined, as he took his departure.

Solomons's store was situated right in the center of the town. It was a regular country store, keeping a most varied assortment of goods.

The old man had a single assistant, a cousin, almost the exact counterpart of himself excepting that his beard was red instead of black.

Abraham Solomons the assistant was named. The old man was in a bad humor all the afternoon and evening, and a hundredth time he bemoaned to his assistant his foolishness in being so hasty.

Trade was not very brisk on this particular night and Solomons closed early.

His store was divided into two apartments after the fashion common to frontier towns.

The front one was occupied by the goods and counter, and the rear room, much smaller, was used as a living apartment.

The two kept bachelor's hall, doing their own cooking.

At the end of the counter, just by the door which led into the rear rooms stood the safe where the old son of Israel kept his valuables.

The doors of the store were strongly defended by bolts and bars and massive locks, and the windows protected by heavy shutters.

It was about as burglar proof as such a structure could be made.

After the store was closed Solomons started for the Rising Sun Hotel.

It was his habit to spend an hour at the hotel every night so as to hear the news of the day.

Solomons was obliged to put up with a good deal of guying on this particular evening on account of the Claverhouse affair, but he took the joking in good part, although at heart he was furiously angry.

He staid at the hotel until nearly eleven and then proceeded to his own domicile.

The night was rather a dark one, for, although there was a moon, yet the heavens were filled with clouds.

A door in the rear of the store gave entrance to the living apartment and the old tradesman proceeded to this entrance.

He knocked, saying:

"It is all right, Abraham; it ish me."

There could be heard from the inside the noise of the undoing of bolts and bars; but, before the door opened, through the darkness in the rear of the old Hebrew came shadowy forms.

Solomons, totally unsuspecting of danger, never noticed the ghost-like visitors.

One stole up behind the old man and, gripping him around the throat, bent his head backward.

At the same moment another mysterious man pressed a large sponge, wet with some pungent liquid to his nostrils, and the two hurried the old storekeeper to one side of the entrance.

Then, as Abraham opened the door, he was confronted by a masked man, who clapped a revolver to his head and cried in a strong, negro dialect:

"Don't you make a sound, white man, if you ain't anxious to die!"

And ere the astonished Abraham could have cried out, if he had been disposed to disregard the warning and attempt to give an alarm, the masked man caught him by the throat.

A second man applied a sponge saturated with chloroform to his nostrils.

Under these circumstances it did not take long for Abraham to become unconscious.

Having thus rendered both of the Solomons helpless, the masked men—there were five in the party—carried the two into the house, carefully closing and locking the door behind them.

Then they proceeded to operate upon the two captives, having come prepared with the necessary articles.

They bound the pair hand and foot so that they were perfectly helpless, then placed each man upon a bunk—there were two in the apartment—with his face toward the wall.

Then they waited until the pair began to recover consciousness.

Isaac was the first to show signs of life.

One of the masked men sat down by the bunk and placed his hand upon him so as to render it impossible for him to turn over.

Then another carefully adjusted a pear-shaped gag in his mouth, thus completely cutting off his speech.

This same process was gone through with Abraham as soon as he began to recover his senses.

"Now, then, gents, I wants you to understand dat you don't stand in no danger if you don't make fools of yourself, and dat's de trufe," the man who acted as leader of the party declared.

"We is jest hyer on a leetle matter of business, and we wants to git through jest as nice and easy as possible.

"Yous is got a long wait afore you for we can't git to work until 'bout two o'clock."

Both of the Jews groaned.

"But we have fixed you up jest as nice and comfortable as we could, and you will have to make the best of it.

"You will be all right in de mornning, you know."

Again the Israelites groaned.

And no wonder, for this was the most daring outrage which had ever been perpetrated in this section.

The boldness and simplicity of the plan contributed to its success.

Of course the Solomons knew what the masked men intended to do.

In the safe the old Jew had nearly five thousand dollars, for that afternoon he had added the money received from Claverhouse to the working capital which he always kept.

Solomons was always ready to buy anything, if a good deal could be made, and so always had a large amount of cash on hand.

The safe in which it was kept was not a particularly good one, being an old, second-hand affair which the old man had picked up at auction.

But he had always considered it to be good enough, for the thought that some night an attempt might be made to rob it had never entered his head.

His domicile was so protected by bolts that he did not consider that it would be possible for any one to break in without his immediately being aware of the fact.

As he had a perfect arsenal of weapons he never doubted that he and his assistant could give the intruders such a warm reception that they would speedily repent their rashness.

But now in the simplest manner possible he had fallen into the hands of the spoilers.

There was a striking clock in the room and the Jews lay and groaned quietly to themselves as they listened to the hours slowly depart.

Abraham was fully as much interested in this robbery as the proprietor, for all his savings—every cent he had in the world was in the safe.

And as the helpless men lay and repined, they speculated over the chances.

Would the robbers be able to force open the safe so as to get at the contents without making so great a noise as to alarm the neighborhood and bring the citizens upon them?

Although the safe was old and anything but burglar proof yet it could not be opened without considerable trouble.

Finally the clock struck two.

"Now then, boys, the time has come for us to go to work," the robber leader said.

"I is going to leave one man hyer to attend to you two, and you don't want to try any foolishness now if you don't want to git hurt."

The caution was unnecessary.

Both of the captives were so thoroughly secured that they hardly dared to breathe.

The three examined the safe.

"W'ot do yous think ob it?" asked the leader.

"We can try de old game, knock de spindle off and then ram in a charge of powder.

"De explosion will make some noise, you know, but we can deaden it by piling a great quantity of stuff over de safe," replied the man, also evidently a negro, who made the examination of the iron box.

"Dat's de way to do it! One of yous go to de front door, and the other to the back one, and as soon as a noise is made listen and see if it has roused anybody," the leader commanded.

"But, I say, what is de use of going to all this hyer trouble?" the man with the hoarse negro voice asked, the one who had examined the safe.

"If we go through dis yere programme we will knock the day-lights out of de concern and it seems to me to be a shame to ruin de safe, for it is worth a good hundred dollars of any one's money, but arter I get through with it it will be hardly worth a dollar for old iron."

Solomons groaned; surely he was having a hard time of it.

"I reckon this 'ere ole gemman is a man who will listen to reason when he hears dat same. W'ot is de use of our bursting his safe all to pieces when he kin open it for us if he will only agree for to oblige you."

"Dat's so—dat is a sure enuff t'ing!" the negro leader observed.

"I will gib the ole man a chance, anyhow."

Then the ruffian proceeded to loosen the bonds which bound Solomons's wrists and ankles.

Then they lifted him from the bunk, carried him to the safe and set him down in a chair before it.

"Dat is a good chance for you, white man?" the leader of the gang declared. "Jest you unlock the safe for us and it will save a heap of trouble."

Solomons did not dare to refuse. He was helpless in the hands of the marauders, and felt satisfied that he had fallen into the power of a gang who would not hesitate to commit any outrage.

The old tradesman manipulated the combination for a few moments; then the door flew open and his treasures were at the mercy of the thieves!

The leader was provided with a common canvas bag such as are in common use by miners.

Into this, with scant ceremony, the wealth of the safe was dumped.

After Solomons opened the door they returned him to his bunk so he was spared the pain of seeing himself despoiled.

In five minutes the safe was completely cleaned out, and then the robbers stole away so silently that neither of the Solomons were aware that they had departed.

The Israelites wondered why the men were so quiet, and finally came to the conclusion that they must be in front of the store helping themselves to an assortment of the goods.

And this thought made old Solomons groan in bitter anguish.

But, as twenty—thirty minutes passed, and the pair heard no sound, they concluded the robbers had departed.

Old Solomons plucked up courage enough to turn over. The coal-oil lamp, which was affixed to a bracket on the wall, fully illuminated the apartment.

Perceiving that the robbers had gone, the old man made a desperate effort to release himself from his bonds. He succeeded in getting the gag out of his mouth and then immediately called upon Abraham to try and help himself.

The assistant rolled over and in his anxiety and zeal came off the bunk to the ground.

The fall helped to loosen the bonds though, and after ten minutes' hard work Abraham succeeded in freeing himself.

Then he released the old Jew.

With disconsolate faces the pair surveyed the open safe.

"Mine gootness! Abraham, this beats anything that I ever heard of in all my life!" Solomons declared.

"It vas awful!" Abraham responded with a sad shake of the head.

"We must gife the alarm immediately! We must rouse the sheriff, and the mayor, and the chief of police, and everybody!"

"Yes, yes, we must!"

"If they give chase at once maybe they will be able to catch the rascals!"

"Go to the Rising Sun Hotel! the mayor stays there, and get him up first!"

"Yes, yes, I will fly!" and Abraham hurried away.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE INVESTIGATION.

ALTHOUGH it was nearly three o'clock Abraham had no difficulty in gaining admission to the hotel.

Colonel Boone prided himself upon conducting his hotel upon first-class Eastern principles, so a night clerk was engaged, and entrance to the Rising Sun was as free after midnight as before.

"I want to see the mayor upon important business, and he must be got out of bed at once!" Abraham exclaimed.

"I reckon you will not find that an easy matter," the clerk replied.

"He must be got up!" the Son of Israel persisted.

"You can't get a man up when he hasn't gone to bed," the other responded, with a grin.

"How was that?" Abraham demanded.
 "There is an all-night poker party in No. 1, and His Honor, the Mayor, is holding one of the chairs down," the clerk explained.

"Ah, yes, yes! can I see him?"
 "Certainly! what is to hinder you? Go to the room and walked in."

It was a very select poker party indeed. There was the mayor, Colonel Boone, Jim Peters, two of the leading tradesmen of the city and a couple of first-class gamblers, men of the Curly Masterton stamp who could be depended upon to do the square thing every time.

The appearance of the Hebrew rushing into the room in a great state of excitement, startled the players.

"Oh, Mister Mayor, something awful has happened!" Abraham cried.

"What is the matter? Somebody murdered?"

"We have been robbed!" the caller responded, wringing his hands and apparently on the point of collapsing in tears.

"Robbed!" echoed everybody in the room.

"Mine goodness, yes! All the money in the safe is gone—over five thousand dollars!"

"Hello, hello! this is a mighty serious business!" and Peters sprung to his feet.

The rest followed his example and they pressed Abraham to give an account of the affair.

He complied, and great was the astonishment of the listeners.

"By Jove! gentlemen, this is the boldest thing of the kind that ever happened in this district!" Mayor Thompson declared.

"Yes, it certainly knocks the socks out of anything that has ever happened in Red Water City since I had anything to do with it!" the sheriff declared.

"We must make an immediate examination!" the mayor exclaimed. "Perhaps we may be able to get some clue."

"We will need lanterns," the sheriff suggested. "How are you off for lanterns, colonel?"

"There are three or four in the house down to the corral," the host replied.

"We have a couple at the store," Abraham said.

Lanterns were procured and the party set out.

Solomons received them at the door, the picture of despair.

"Ah, mine goodness! I am a ruined man," he wailed.

"Oh, no, not so bad as all that!" the mayor cried, jocosely.

"What are a few thousand dollars to a man of wealth, like yourself? Only a flea-bite!"

"Ah, yes, yes, but I have not been making any money lately and this loss will break me all up!" Solomons declared.

By virtue of his office the sheriff took charge of the examination which he conducted in the most careful and searching manner.

He had Solomons give an account of the affair from the beginning, and took notes at intervals.

"It is the most simple game that I ever heard of, and about the boldest!" Jim Peters declared.

Then he caused the old Jew to give a careful and minute description of the men—that is, he tried to get one, but the old Jew could not give a good description.

He had been so decidedly "rattled" by the attack that it was not possible for him to give a clear account.

As nearly as he could remember the men were about the medium size, and were dressed like common workmen in rough flannel shirts, with their pantaloons stuck into their boots.

Their faces were hidden by black masks and they were all heavily armed.

Then the old Jew suddenly remembered.

The man who acted as leader of the gang and his lieutenant were negroes.

This announcement was a decided surprise to the investigators.

"Niggers!" the majority of them exclaimed in a breath.

"Oh, yes, negroes," Solomons assured, and Abraham confirmed the statement.

"How did you know they were niggers?" the sheriff asked, decidedly incredulous.

"By their voice—the way they spoke, you

know, and then I saw their hands and they were black," the old Jew replied.

Then there was a heated discussion by the party in regard to which of the negro residents of the town it was likely to be.

There were thirty odd blacks in Red Water City, and, possibly, ten extra in the immediate neighborhood.

The characters of the greater part were not particularly good; they were known to be lazy, and it was certain that they would not hesitate to do any petty thieving if opportunity was afforded them.

But, as far as the investigators knew, there wasn't a man of them who would attempt a game of this kind.

"I couldn't pick a single man out of the entire lot likely to be able for a job of this kind!" the mayor declared.

No man in the town knew the blacks as well as his Honor the mayor, for the majority of them had been before him when the "morning watch" was disposed of, accused of minor crimes—drunkenness, fighting, petty thefts, but Thompson declared himself to be completely at fault to pick out the men.

"It clean beats me, gents!" he confessed.

"Ah, this is one of the biggest bluffs that was ever put up!" the sheriff declared.

"No niggers had anything more to do with this affair than I have."

"Don't you see the game?"

"The darky business was a cunning trick to throw pursuit on a flash trail."

"It is an easy matter for a man to black his hands and talk like a nig. There's no great trick in that, and that is just the game these galoots worked."

This idea was discussed at length, and the investigators concluded that he was right in his surmise.

A careful examination was made in the store.

The gags and bonds were just made out of common pieces of cotton cloth, such as could be purchased anywhere, and afforded no clue.

Then the party got all the lanterns they could muster, and proceeded to make a careful examination in the neighborhood of the store.

A good hour the investigators spent, but only had their labor for their pains.

It was the supposition of the searchers that the robbers had horses tethered in the neighborhood, and that, after the job was done, the men mounted their steeds and rode off.

The trackers found plenty of places where horses had been recently fastened.

In fact, found traces of fully twenty different horses, but that afforded no clue owing to the fact that it was the custom of the men who rode into the city from a distance to tether their horses at different points, while they put in their time in the hotels and saloons.

Then, when they got ready to go home—and the cowboy class rarely got out of the town until close to midnight—they mounted their steeds and rode away.

"We can't do anything until morning, pard, and we might as well stop," the sheriff said at last in disgust.

CHAPTER XV.

GETTING AT THE FACTS.

THE inhabitants of Red Water City were decidedly astonished when they learned the particulars of the robbery, and at least fifty men turned themselves into detectives, anxious to find a clue to the thieves.

But the robbers had managed the affair so carefully that not a single trace had they left behind.

As the sheriff had said in the beginning, the thing had been so worked in such a blamed simple way.

The fact that the old storekeeper had over a thousand dollars in the safe was widely known throughout the town, as the sheriff's posse had discussed the matter in the saloons on their return.

The citizens were very indignant, and a sort of impromptu mass meeting was held, at which the mayor presided.

A reward of a thousand dollars was offered for the apprehension of the robbers, and arrangements were made to have a night patrol hereafter.

Then the meeting adjourned.

The mayor and the sheriff proceeded to the private office of Thompson, and, helping themselves to chairs, sat down to debate about the matter.

"Of course, a man can't show his hand at a mass-meeting," Jim Peters remarked.

"No, for the chances are that some of the men who did the job might be listening to the talk."

"As far as I can see this hyer thing has clean run up a tree."

"And our chief of police, if he was here, wouldn't be worth shucks in a case of this kind," the mayor observed.

The marshal of the town, the head of the police force, was a big desperado known as Bud McCracken.

He had been made marshal simply because he was one of the ugliest men in the town, going on the principle of setting a thief to catch a thief.

Bud McCracken was an ugly, quarrelsome fellow, but after being made marshal he took pride in keeping out of difficulties himself and in preserving order in the town.

But such a man to catch robbers of the kind who had perpetrated the crime was perfectly useless.

"I don't see as we can do a thing," the sheriff declared.

"Now, cipher the affair up, so as to get right down to the bed-rock."

"This job may have been done by a regular gang who make a business of the thing—who travel around the country, watch their opportunities, and then go in for the plunder."

"After the job is done they scoot as fast as possible."

"If that is the way the game is worked we don't stand any chance to capture them," the mayor concluded.

"That is my idea exactly; but then, on the other hand, the men who worked the game may hold out right in this neighborhood, and as they will be pretty sure to be flush with their money, by keeping watch of the men who are doing the high-roller business, we may get at the thieves."

Both mayor and sheriff had their suspicions, but suspicion was not proof; so all they could do was to watch and wait.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE NEW YORKER'S DETERMINATION.

LAWRENCE VANDERMILLER and Hickory Bill had strolled up in the foot-hills and having reached a position from which they commanded a full view of the town took a seat upon a projecting boulder and looked down upon Red Water City.

"Hickory, do you know that I have been in a very uncertain state of mind for the last week?" the young man remarked abruptly.

"Oh, yes, any one could see with half-an-eye that you were kinder worrying 'bout something," the old mountain-man replied.

"I always considered myself endowed with common sense and had faith in my own judgment, but, since a certain affair I am beginning to doubt my common sense and judgment."

"It is kinder rough for a man to get that opinion of himself," was the old scout's inference.

"But, I say, pardner, what's causing of you to change your mind?"

"Well, it is rather a difficult subject to explain," Vandermiller replied, gazing abstractly at the distant town.

"Mebbe I will not be more than two gunshots out of the way if I suggest that some female woman has got something to do with this 'ere case."

"You are right; a woman is mixed up in it."

"It ain't surprising, for a woman has been reg'larly mixed up with all the trouble in this world since the days of Adam and Eve, when the old man got clucked out of the richest strike that ever was."

"I am completely upset!" Vandermiller declared, "and for the life of me I can't tell what is best to do."

The old mountain-man reflected over the matter for a few moments. He very much liked the New Yorker. During the time they had been together he had taken a great

fancy to him; and it was not strange, either, for Lawrence Vandermiller had a great many noble qualities.

"Wa-al, I ain't one of the kind who goes out of his way offering advice to every Tom, Dick, and Harry," he said at last; "but, if any man who has got any kind of a claim on me at all is desirous for me to turn my searching apparatus into his affairs then you kin bet your level dollar that I will do the best I can for him."

"If you think I kin do you any good I shall only be too proud to do it!"

Vandermiller extended his palm impulsively and shook hands with the old mountain-man.

"Jackson, you are as square a man as ever trod the earth!" the New Yorker averred. "I don't doubt that you can give me good advice, and I will be glad indeed if you will aid me with your counsel."

"You kin bet all you are worth or ever expect to be worth, that if I don't do you any good it will not be for the lack of try ing!"

"Oh, yes; I feel sure of that, so I'll tell you just what is troubling me."

And the New Yorker related to Old Hickory the particulars of his acquaintance with Katherine Montrose.

He told the woman's story likewise, and kept back none of the details necessary to a full understanding.

Related also how he had confessed to her that he thought just as much of her as in the old time, and would be glad to enter the lists as a suitor for her hand.

"Mighty big lot of difference in your position, though," Hickory observed.

"She thoroughly comprehended that part, but it did not seem to make any impression upon her."

"It is awful hard work to tell sometimes 'bout these hyer wimmin," old Hickory assumed.

"Of course, my pride was offended when she declared that she would never be willing to become my wife; but I did not attempt to persuade her to change her resolution, and made up my mind to go away and forget her."

"Yes, I remember that the next day after you met the lady you told me you reckoned you wouldn't stay long in this hyer town."

"We have stuck right hyer, though," Hickory added.

"Yes, because, to tell you the truth, I do not find it possible for me to tear myself away," Vandermiller admitted with a sad smile.

"Wa-al, a man does git caught that way, sometimes."

"I have argued and reasoned with myself about the matter, and the result is that the longer I discuss the affair the stronger becomes my conviction that I will never be satisfied without the woman if I can possibly get her."

"If it is your nature to feel that way you can't help it. A man can't change his nature, any more than a snake can change its spots."

"I have plenty of money and there is nothing in the world I want except this one particular woman!" the New Yorker went on.

"Wa-a, then, sakes alive! I would sail in to get her and do my leetle durndest. So I say, pardner, jist gird up your loins and wade into the fight!"

"If you do that it seems to me that the odds are all on your side."

"Of course the moment it is understood that I am one of the lady's suitors it will bring down upon me the enmity of the men who are after her, and that means that I probably shall have to meet some of the desperadoes in single fight," Vandermiller assumed.

"Wa-al, there's one galoot will try to jump on you, and that is this Curly Masterton, who is now laid up with a broken arm."

"He has a leetle account to settle with Claverhouse, but he won't let a thing of that kind trouble him if he gits the idea that you are in his way."

"The fellow seems to have perfect confidence that he can lay out his man every time."

"Sart'in! that is his big stock in trade!" the old mountain-man observed.

"That is what he travels on. When he

swaggers into a saloon, people say who is that galoot who is putting on as much airs as if he owned the town? Why, that is the celebrated gambler desperado who has killed more men than he has fingers and toes!"

"Then the folks kinder move to one side and give him room; but, I tell you, Mister Vandermiller, I ain't got no use for any sich men, and if you would like to have me look out for Curly Masterton I will agree to wipe him out with neatness and dispatch."

The New Yorker looked at the old mountain-man in amazement.

"Upon my word this is an astonishing proposition of yours!"

"Yes, and I mean it, too; never was more serious in my life and that is where the joke comes in."

"But you are not a desperado—you don't follow the bravo business—being ready to remove obnoxious personages at so much per head."

"Oh, no; but, I don't mind making an exception in favor of Curly Masterton," the old mountain-man averred, in a business-like way.

Vandermiller saw that the scout was really in earnest, and his surprise increased.

"Well, upon my word, I must admit that you have puzzled me!" the New Yorker exclaimed; "that you should offer to take this desperado off my hands is astonishing."

"Yes, I suppose it is, but when I come to explain the matter to you you will see it is all strictly in the way of business," Hickory asserted.

"Now, take my early life upon the plains; do you suppose we scouts ever hesitated to kill an Injun if we met the cuss in the open wilderness?"

"Nary time; for we knew that it was either the red skin's life or ours. So, when I meet a man like this Curly Masterton, I'm dead game on sich. He is a reg'lar human wolf, going around seeking whom he may devour."

"I don't hold it to be a sin to wipe out a man of that ar' kind, provided you give him a fair chance for his life. In fact, I consider it to be a mighty praiseworthy action."

"Then, too, I really have got a row to pick with this miserable gambler, an' t'isn't a recent affair, for it dates back a dozen years or so."

"Up in Prescott, at that time a mighty fast little town, this Curly Masterton had a scrap with an old mountain pard of mine; both got themselves full of bullets, and both managed to get well, at the time; but my pard died a few months afterwards, and it has allers been on my mind, that if it hadn't been for this fight he wouldn't have died; so, you see, I kinder charge this gambler with his death. So I think I have got a blamed sight more reason to fight with him than you have."

"Well, I will go ahead in pursuit of the lady, and if I have to meet some of these warriors in single fight I will put up the best contest I can for the honor of old New York."

That decided, the two arose and took their way back to the hotel.

Vandermiller called upon Katherine Montrose, at once. He pressed his suit with ardor—told her she was the only woman whom he cared for, in the world, and that he had made up his mind to win her, no matter how many the obstacles in the way.

Katherine Montrose smiled a sad smile.

"A willful man will have his own way," she observed; "but I will not encourage you, for I do not believe I will ever marry again, as I have already told you."

"You are a woman and liable to change your mind!" the New Yorker opined.

CHAPTER XVII.

A HIGH-ROLLER.

ANOTHER week has gone by. The Express messenger who had been so badly wounded during the attack on the train, had rallied, and was now pronounced out of danger, so the sin of murder was lifted from the shoulders of the robbers.

No trace had been discovered of the daring thieves, though, although it was said that the Express and railroad authorities had about fifty Pinkerton detectives in disguise scattered through the district.

Neither had any clues been found to

cunning scamps who had got away with the the old storekeeper's wealth, and the suspicion was gaining ground that one gang did both jobs.

On this particular night of which we write Red Water City was unusually lively. About fifty cowboys had come down from the north, all flush with money, and determined to have a good time.

Colonel Boone's Rising Sun Hotel caught the most part of this crowd of bacchanals.

Some of the townsmen felt pretty lively on this particular evening—among them Martin Butterick, the blacksmith, a big, brawny, smooth-faced Englishman of forty-five or thereabout, who broke loose on a deuce of a time.

This was something unexpected, for, as a rule, the blacksmith was a steady going fellow.

On this evening he had developed into a regular high-roller.

He was provided with plenty of money which he was spending with the utmost freedom.

He pitched into the faro game as though convinced that he could break the bank.

He had remarkable luck, and for the first hour it looked as if the drunken smithy was going to get away with a big amount of the bank's cash.

The man was a novice at cards, though, and whatever gains he made came through dumb luck, as the veteran gambler observed, who watched his play.

During the second hour Martin lost all he gained.

In the third hour his original capital commenced to go, but the blacksmith had "sand" and stuck to the game although the tide had set so strongly against him.

A host of people watched the game.

As it happened old Solomons and the peddler, Jerry Green, stood side by side.

In the bustling Western towns there is little pride of place, so the Israelite did not hesitate to enter into familiar conversation with the medicine-hawker.

"Does it not make you sick to see a man make such a fool of himself?" old Solomons asked of the peddler.

"Yes, he has got his skin full of liquor, and when liquor is in sense is out. But he seems to have plenty of money to-night," the peddler observed with a shrewd twinkle in his eyes.

"Yes, and that is what I do not understand at all," the old Jew decidedly declared. "I never knew him to have any money before."

"Is that so?"

"Yes, during the six months that he has been my neighbor I know very well that he has not made more than a living, and where he has got so much money is a wonder. He has already lost over five hundred dollars and he is keeping on as if he had more to lose."

A peculiar expression appeared on the countenance of old Solomons.

He glanced around the room, took another look at the desperate gambler and then said, using a more cautious tone than before:

"Mine friend, I have a very good opinion of your sense; a man like you who can travel all over the country and make money out of a little fool thing like that medicine must be very smart."

"Now, I am going to ask you, do you think there is a chance that this blacksmith was one of the men who robbed me?"

The expression of the peddler's face did not change, but a peculiar light came into his eyes.

"Of course, it is only a suspicion," he suggested.

"Certainly, for I have no proof," the Jew admitted; "but, mine goot friend, I cannot do anything. A man like yourself might be able to get a clue, though, if you worked the game in a skillful manner."

"Well, I will do what I can for you."

"Has he any particular cronies—men with whom he constantly associates?"

"I do not know. I was not well enough acquainted with him to say as to that."

"Well, don't say anything about the matter to any one and I will do what I can," the peddler assured.

By this time Martin became disgusted with his losses and stopped playing.

He went to the bar and took a drink and

then another and another until he became helpless.

"It is all right; I will take him home," the peddler said, as he stepped forward.

CHAPTER XVIII.

PLAYING THE SPY.

THE peddler departed with the blacksmith, but, before he had gotten steps down the street, found the job too much for him, for once on the street the blacksmith lost all power in his legs, and the pilot could not possibly hold the man up and both men went down in the dust together.

They were among friends, however, for a half a dozen sprung forward to their assistance and the blacksmith was hoisted to his feet again.

But it was a "dead drunk;" the smith could not stand even with help, so they were obliged to procure a shutter, and on this Martin was carried to his shanty.

The lamp in the rough room was lit and the blacksmith was dumped upon his bunk.

"I reckon that in the interest of common humanity I ought to stay hyer and keep watch on him," the peddler remarked. "I can curl up on this buffalo-robe, and if he should get a fit of tremens on him I'll be on hand to pull him out of it."

The rest thought this a good idea, so they departed, leaving the peddler in charge.

Jerry Green's first move was to bolt the door; then he proceeded to overhaul the blacksmith's quarters, but the search was fruitless; nothing was discovered to show that the smith had ever been connected with any unlawful enterprise.

"The peddler was not convinced. I have an idea that this is the man who is wanted," his thoughts ran.

"He answers to the description of the big fellow who swung the sledge and knocked the spindle off the safe. Such a job would be right in his line, and then, too, of the two supposed negroes Solomons describes, one of them was a big man, and this is he, or I miss my guess."

"The fellows are clever rascals, though; or, rather, they have a shrewd leader; but, whoever he is, he is bound to make a blunder sooner or later, and then there will be a chance to do some good work."

The spy watcher went to sleep, and both men slept soundly until six o'clock; then the blacksmith awoke with a sudden start.

He had slept off all trace of his intoxication and the astonishment was great with which he surveyed the peddler peacefully slumbering on the buffalo-robe.

Martin rose to a sitting posture, and scowled at the sleeping man.

"Well, now, this beats my time!" he muttered.

"How on earth did that galoot get in here?"

As he spoke aloud now, in his anger, it awoke the peddler, who at once arose to a sitting posture and smiled blandly at the smith.

"Well, how are you now—all right?" he asked.

"What the devil do you mean?" Martin cried. "Of course I am all right; but, I say, what are you doing here?" and he scowled threateningly.

"Why, I came home with you last night, and as the boys who brought you home on a shutter thought I had better stay with you for fear that you might be sick in the night, I staid."

"Well, I don't thank you for doing anything of the kind!" the blacksmith scowled.

"When I want visitors I will invite 'em, and if there is anything that I hate it is for strangers to come sneaking and spying in my place."

"Well, I merely did what the boys wanted me to do," the peddler asserted meekly; "and I can assure you that I hadn't any idea of sneaking or spying, for I am a man who always attends to my own business," and he arose to his feet.

"I don't know you, and I don't want to know you, and I want you to get out!"

"Certainly!" and the peddler hastened away as though he was much alarmed.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE GAMBLER'S IDEA.

NEARLY a month had now gone by since Curly Masterton, the gambler, had received

the injury to his arm, and the doctor had said that, in another week, he would have the use of the member again.

The sport was a man in vigorous health, and as he was wise enough to pay implicit obedience to the doctor's directions, his cure had been a speedy one.

On this particular morning he sat in a corner of Rising Sun Hotel office, the man of medicine had just departed, and the landlord, Colonel Boone, came up and took a chair by the gambler's side.

"Well, what did old sawbones have to say for himself this morning?" the colonel asked.

"Oh, about the same as usual. I am getting along all right, and next week will be about as well as ever."

"That is good, and I suppose that as soon as you feel like yourself again you will proceed to make things lively for certain parties?" the landlord remarked with a grin.

"I certainly shall try to settle up some little matters which at present are in an unfinished state," was replied, in a business-like manner.

"Well, I can tell you, Curly, that there is one thing about the affair which surprises me," Colonel Boone said.

"What is that?"

"The fact that you should become interested in a woman. I have known you now for a dozen years, and never knew you to take the least interest in any female."

"That is the truth; this is the first time I ever allowed myself to become attracted by one of the softer sex," the gambler admitted.

"But I trust you know me well enough to be aware that I am not the kind of man to make a donkey of myself for the sake of a woman or anybody else."

"No, you are one of the hard boss sense kind of men."

"There is a deal of good solid business in this little love making of mine," the gambler explained, "for, you see, I am not as young as I once was, and am beginning to think that it is about time for me to settle down."

"Yes, I see."

"It would be my idea to open a game in some lively town—this Red Water City would answer, for I reckon the place is blooming ahead as fast, if not faster than any other town of its size in the State of Arizona."

"I reckon thar ain't a doubt 'bout that," the colonel assented.

"Now then, just see what an advantage it would be to me to have a splendid woman like this Katherine Montrose to preside over the establishment?"

"That is so!" admitted the colonel, struck by the force of the argument. "Such a woman would be a mighty big advantage to a man in a public line."

"Not a doubt about it, and that is why I am so anxious to secure the lady."

"Yes, I see. Well, your head is level, Masterton; thar's no doubt about that."

"As a rule I reckon that I generally know what I am doing," the gambler averred, complacently.

"I expect that the rancher, Claverhouse, will give you a mighty tough fight," the landlord suggested, "for he is awful anxious to get the girl, and doesn't seem to care if he fights the hull blamed town for her."

"Oh, yes, the man has sand enough," Curly Masterton replied in a careless, indifferent way.

"But, my dear colonel, I can tell you that I don't have much fear in regard to the outcome."

"It is true I did not succeed in my first meeting, but that was one of the most ridiculous fights that ever occurred."

"I never saw or heard of one like it. Why, two of the greenest tenderfeet in the town could not have made a worse show."

"It was a mighty queer jumble, and no mistake!" the colonel assented.

"But, you will find the next one will go through, and when the affair ends there will be either one or two men less in the town."

There was silence for a few moments, and then the landlord re-opened the conversation:

"This Montrose woman is a mighty attractive female, and my wife says she is a

perfect lady, too—a woman who could go right into the best society."

"I don't doubt it."

"She comes from the East, and, I reckon, she amounted to something thar."

"Very likely."

"By the way, that reminds me!" exclaimed the colonel, abruptly; "thar's a little p'int I was going to put you up on. This hyer rancher, this Englishman, ain't the most dangerous rival that you have got?"

"Is that so?" asked the gambler, surprised.

"Sart'ln! As sure as you're born! Thar's a man right hyer in the house whom my wife says can give him cards and spades and beat him right out of his boots, and what Mrs. Boone says is worth paying attention to, you bet your life!"

"Oh, yes, I know that your better half is nobody's fool. Who is this man?"

"It is the New Yorker, Vander Miller, the man who is traveling to see the sights, and has that tough old cuss, Jackson, with him as a guide."

"I know the pair, although I have never had any conversation with either of them."

"My wife happened to come into the parlor one day when the two were conversing, and Miss Montrose explained that he was an old friend whom she had known in the East."

"Then the wife got to running her about him, as these women will do, and she admitted that he was anxious to marry her, for they used to be lovers. The New Yorker is a rich man, and with the advantage of his old acquaintance it seems to me that none of the rest of you stand any show at all."

Curly Masterton laughed.

"My dear colonel, a game is never lost until it is ended, and, I reckon, this New Yorker isn't going to have any walk-over."

"I will have to have a little talk with him and explain how matters stand, for it is probable that he does not comprehend."

"He is not in New York now, and we Westerners are not in the habit of allowing strangers to walk in and carry off our prize without making the biggest kind of a fight."

"By the way, hyer they come now," the colonel said.

Vander Miller and Hickory Jackson entered the room and took seats in the opposite corner, and Colonel Boone being summoned away the gambler had an opportunity to observe them.

"The New Yorker looks as if he might have sand enough to stand up to the rack and take his fodder like a man," the gambler soliloquized.

"But, where have I seen the other man?" Curly Masterton mused. "His face is certainly familiar, and yet I can't recall his name just at present, and that is odd."

CHAPTER XX.

THE OLD SCOUT AND THE GAMBLER.

CURLY MASTERTON watched the old mountain-man for some time, and was rather annoyed that he could not place him.

It was strange, for the gambler had an excellent memory and was seldom at fault in a thing of this kind.

"I reckon that it don't amount to anything anyway," the gambler murmured at last.

"I will go over and explain to the stranger how the land lies—give him fair and due warning to keep off the grass, so to speak."

The gambler sauntered over to the corner where Vander Miller and Hickory Jackson sat, greeted them with a polite bow, an agreeable smile, and a pleasant "good-morning," at the same time helping himself to a chair.

The pair nodded in response to the salutation.

"You gentlemen are strangers in Red Water City if I mistake not?"

"Yes," replied Vander Miller.

"The landlord, Colonel Boone, was explaining to me this morning that you were making a tour of the West."

The New Yorker nodded.

"He also told me that you, Mr. Vander Miller, was an old acquaintance of Miss Katherine Montrose."

"That is true."

"And he further stated that you were tar-rying in the town here for the express purpose of inducing her to become your wife."

The New Yorker flushed up, annoyed at the speech.

"Really, you know, that is a little matter of private business which I cannot think of discussing with a stranger!" the New Yorker answered.

"Oh, I see! I didn't introduce myself, did I," the gambler remarked, coolly; "but now let me repair the oversight. My name is Curly Masterton; I am desperately in love with Miss Montrose, and anybody who makes any pretensions to engage the affections of the lady must count upon fighting me to the death."

"Really, sir, you have made a big mistake if you think to frighten me by any announcement of this kind!" Vander Miller retorted, haughtily.

"My dear sir, don't labor under any misapprehension about the matter!" the gambler hastened to exclaim; "I don't want to frighten you, but I think it is only right that you should understand how circumstances are."

"Claverhouse, the rancher, and I had a scrap about the lady a short time ago, which led to my being laid up, and as soon as I am in fighting condition we will try and settle the matter."

"I can't very well take you on ahead of Claverhouse, for he has first choice, but after I settle him I will attend to you," the gambler explained with really magnificent insolence.

"Wa-al, wa-al, Curly Masterton, you have not changed a mite in ten years!" the old mountain-man now interposed.

The gambler looked at the speaker in surprise.

"Oh, I mean what I say! You put up the same good, old stiff bluff that you used to, ten years ago, in Prescott whar you went on as if you owned the town."

"I thought I had seen you before somewhere, but I couldn't place you," the gambler said in a way which showed he was rather annoyed. "You were one of the Prescott chaps?"

"I was in the town, off and on, at the time when you were making yourself out to be a big chief."

"Well, I don't know as it makes much difference whether I have the pleasure of your acquaintance or not," the gambler declared. "I certainly don't remember your name."

"Hickory Bill Jackson!" ejaculated the scout.

"Oh, you were one of those mountain-men," Curly Masterton assumed, a shade passing over his face.

"Yes, I was one of the scouts, and if you remember that though we scouts and you gamblers locked horns half-a-dozen times, you pasteboard fellers never could boast of having secured any advantage."

"I really do not remember," the gambler returned with an air of indifference.

"It is a long time ago, and I have forgotten all the circumstances."

"Wa-al, I haven't, and as I was telling my pard, hyer, when I saw you for the first time, on the night when you had the fight with the Englishman, I was sorry that you were laid up, for I reckon I wouldn't mind having a whack at you myself for the purpose of squaring up the old account."

The gambler flamed up at once.

"By Jove, sir, I want you to understand that I am always ready to meet my men, and it doesn't matter whether the quarrel dates back a day or ten years!"

"Oh, I am not at all afraid of your not coming up to the scratch, for you were always noted for doing that."

"I thought I would speak and tell you the interest I take in this matter, seeing that you were making your dates."

"You are going to take on the Englishman and Mister Vander Miller hyer, but when you come down to how the things ought to be worked I think I ought to be entitled to the first choice."

"That is for me to decide!" the gambler angrily assumed.

"No, it ain't! not by a jugful!" the old mountain-man protested. "If so be I say fight, it is fight, and you have got to come

up to the scratch whether you like it or not, Mister Sport!"

This speech of course angered Curly Masterton exceedingly, and he glanced at Old Hickory with eyes blazing with rage.

"By Jove, sir, do you dare to insinuate that I am afraid to meet you?" he questioned, with fierce emphasis.

"It is your own actions which is giving the thing away," Old Bill retorted. "If you go to putting me off, and meeting other men when I am entitled to the fust choice, it would look like it, I should say."

"When you come down to the rights of the thing, you can't put me off without showing the white feather, for, if I go for you, it is fight or run!"

By this time the gambler had somewhat recovered his composure, for he well realized that the old mountaineer was in earnest, and understood, also, that he could not get out of meeting him first.

"It is all right; you shall come first," he acquiesced. "It doesn't really make any difference to me. But, I had an idea that all this old quarrel was ended, and I am surprised at its coming up now."

"You had a scrap with a pard of mine, and both of you were shot full of holes," Hickory Bill explained.

"My pard didn't die of his wounds, but as he only lasted six months I reckoned the fight really killed him."

"That man had slept under the same blanket with me for five years, off and on. I couldn't have thought any more of him if he had been my brother; and when I heard of his death I swore that if I ever came across you I would call you to an account, and now, I am arter vengeance, bigger'n a wolf."

"You shall have all the satisfaction you want, but you will have to wait until next week, when the doctor says my arm will be well," Curly Masterton remarked, rising as he spoke.

"That is all right," Hickory replied. "I am not at all disposed to push you. The only pint I am arter is that I come first."

"I am willing to wait two weeks for ye—a month for that matter if ye can't get in fix before."

"You can depend upon my settling the affair as soon as possible, for I am just as anxious to bring the matter to a close as you are," the gambler assumed, as he took his departure.

Curly Masterton was decidedly disappointed at the result of this unexpected interview. The old scout was about the last man in the world whom he wanted to face.

Although a regular bulldog, as far as courage went, yet he had serious apprehension in regard to a meeting with the mountain veteran. But, he put on a bold front, and muttered to himself as he departed:

"I will kill him, though!"

CHAPTER XXI.

PLAYING A DEEP GAME.

JERRY GREEN, the peddler, had apparently entered for the war, for, after he had been so unceremoniously dismissed by the blacksmith, he made a careful examination of the neighborhood with the idea of finding a place from which he could keep watch on the blacksmith.

Across the street was a fourth-rate saloon which bore the name of the Flush Hotel.

The peddler had been in there a half-a-dozen times, so he knew just what sort of a place it was.

It was kept by an Irishman—a jolly, red-headed, middle-aged man known as Mike McKenna.

He had taken quite a fancy to the quaint peddler with his Gila Monster yarns, so when Jerry dropped into the saloon and casually remarked that he had to get a new roosting place, the Irishman at once said that if all he wanted was a bunk, he could give him one at the back of the bar-room in a little nook.

Of course the peddler declared that this was just what he wanted.

"I ain't no millionaire to be nosing 'round for a room," he said.

Jerry took up his quarters at the Flush Hotel, and after he did so watched all who came and went to the blacksmith's place as closely as a cat ever watched a mouse.

For three days this vigil was kept up with-

out the watcher being rewarded by any information, but on the third day, late in the afternoon, an undersized, sneaking-looking man, dressed like a miner, and whose features plainly showed that he was a Cockney Englishman, paid a visit to the blacksmith.

He remained with him until after supper and departed.

The peddler, now on the alert, followed the man and when he went into a saloon, allowed a few minutes to elapse, and then he, too, entered.

The stranger was taking a drink at the bar when the medicine-man passed in.

Jerry marched up to the counter and called for some whisky just as if he had called there for the sole purpose of getting a drink.

Then he pretended to catch sight of the face of the stranger by whose side he stood.

"Why, why, this here is a surprise!" he exclaimed, as though much amazed. "Blow me tight if you ain't about the last man I expected to see up in this neck of the woods! How goes it, old man? and where have you been for this dog's age?"

The stranger took a good look at the peddler and then cried:

"If it ain't Jimmy Legs then I am a Dutchman!"

"You bet!"

The two shook hands heartily.

"Stow 'Jimmy Legs' here," the peddler warned in a cautious tone. "I ain't traveling under that name now."

"Oh, that is all right," the other replied with a glance around. "There isn't anybody paying any attention to us."

"Well, I can tell you that I never was much more astonished in my life than when I happened to catch sight of your face," the remedy man averred.

"But this 'ere is no place to talk," he added abruptly. "Suppose we hunt up some shebang where we can have a bottle of beer together in a quiet corner and a talk over old times?"

"That will suit me to the governor's taste," the other assented; "and the place down the street where I have my bunk will about fill the bill."

Jerry at once conducted the other to the Flush Hotel.

McKenna had about all the English trade of the town, and when the peddler introduced his companion as being a Londoner, the jolly Irishman received him warmly, for McKenna had kept a small public-house in London for a dozen years.

The two sat down at a table in a corner where they could converse without fear of being overheard.

"Let me see, I haven't seen you since the time when we were in Fort Smith jail?" the peddler questioned.

"No, not since then."

"How did you come out?"

"I got a year only; the evidence was weak, and they couldn't make a strong case."

"That is just what I told the boys in the jail," the peddler assured.

"You just let Tommy Hodkins alone to get out of a scrape—Yellow Tommy Hodkins, the London cracksmen and one of the best all-around crooks that ever made mince-meat out of bolts and bars!"

"Oh, yes, you can bet your sweet life that I am up to the time of day!"

"But, I say, you were in on a mighty serious charge, if I remember the thing right."

"Yes, I was."

"How did you come out?"

"Well, you see, I had an awful good lawyer, and as the proof in regard to my being the man who did the job was conflicting, he managed to get a disagreement of the jury."

"Good enough! That is the way to work the oracle! Oh, I tell you it pays to have a good lawyer. But, what are you driving away at now? Are you located in this town?"

"I have only recently come here. You see, the fact is I have been playing in awful hard luck for a long time."

"Do the best I could it was hard scratching to get along. Then I fell sick up in a little mining settlement on the Gila where I had got a job as a miner."

"An old Indian cured me, and from him I got the receipt of the medicine, and I have been making a living peddling it ever since."

Then Jerry Green showed Yellow Tommy the vial of medicine, which the latter turned his nose up at.

"Oh, come, I say, old pal, this ain't the kind of work for a man like yourself to be occupying his time at!"

"Yes, I know that, but a man can't always pick and choose, you know. I was down on my luck and couldn't strike a winning game to save me."

"You know that this is a mighty queer country to do business in. One or two men can't do anything; you can't strike any nice little jobs, as you can in a big city, you see."

"True enough," the other assented.

"This is the country where any job that is good for anything has got to be pulled off by a gang, and if a man can't get into one he don't stand much show to make a living."

"That is it—that is just the way the land lies!" Jerry Green declared. "I reckon that I am as smart as I ever was, and if I had any chance I could show it, too, but if a man can't get any pals he can't do anything. But, how have you been working it, by the way?" the peddler asked, abruptly.

"Oh, I am connected with a first-class gang," Yellow Tommy disclosed, dropping his voice to a whisper, "and we have taken some good tricks during the past six months."

"I tell you what is, Yellow, there never was a man like you for fairly tumbling into luck!" the peddler declared in a tone of admiration.

"Yes; it is a mighty sure thing that I will get my share of the big plums!" the other responded, complacently.

"I say, old man, is there any chance for me to come in on this racket?" the medicine-man asked, in a pleading tone. "I am a good all-round man, and can be depended upon to make myself useful."

"Oh, yes, a man like yourself always fixes in handy," and Yellow Tommy meditated for a few moments.

"Wal, I don't see any reason why you shouldn't come right into the party," he declared at last.

"There's going to be a little meeting of the gang to-night, and, if you like, I will take you out and introduce you."

"You will be doing me a mighty big favor if you will!" the peddler urged.

"I will do it! If the boss don't want you no harm will be done. This captain of ours works the things up in first-class style, you know," Yellow Tommy proceeded to explain. "He knows every member of the band, but none of us know him, nor each other!"

"Well, well, that is an ideal!"

"Yes, it is odd," Yellow Tommy admitted. "The idea is to do away with the possibility of one man turning traitor and betraying the rest."

"It is a good ideal!"

"I think so, and so far it has worked splendidly."

"Yes, I should think it would."

"There is a tavern on the Santa Cruz road much frequented by cattle-men, for the stock-yards are located there. There are dozens of strangers coming and going all the time, so the appearance and disappearance of four or five men never excites any attention."

"Certainly not."

"But, it is getting late, and we must be off!" Yellow Tommy declared, rising. "You can get a horse at the hotel corral."

Ten minutes later the pair were on their way to the robbers' retreat.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE OUTLAW CHIEF.

As the pair only had a few miles to go, it did not take them long to cover the distance.

They dismounted at the Stock Yards Hotel, put their horses in the corral, had a drink in the saloon, and then Yellow Tommy led the way out into the night.

Up the road they went for a few hundred yards, then they turned into a side road, and soon came to a lonely ranch hid in a clump of timber.

On the way Yellow Tommy explained the situation.

"You see we are about an hour ahead of the regular meeting time, so I will get a chance to speak to the chief about you."

"A word of recommendation coming from a man like you would go a long way."

"You had better believe it would! You see, the chief and I are old pals. He has known me for a good many years, and he knows that when I say a man can be depended upon it is safe for anybody to bet high on it. The chief has a peculiar way of fixing things."

"Now, when we come to the ranch you will have to stay outside until I go in and see the chief, and get permission from him to introduce you."

"I suppose, of course, that there would be some precautions taken, for otherwise there would be danger of a spy getting at the secrets of the band."

"Oh, we have got the thing fixed so that no spy can get at us!" Yellow Tommy declared.

"In the first place, before a man can get into the ranch he has got to be provided with the password, and it would be a mighty difficult matter for any spy to get at that."

"But, here we are!" and Yellow Tommy led the way through the trees to the ranch.

"Here's an old corn-crib; you wait here until I come for you."

Tommy departed and the peddler took a seat in the door of the corn-crib to wait his return.

While he waited "Mr. Green" fell to meditating upon the situation.

"This is evidently a gang organized with a great deal of care and there isn't any doubt that the man who is at the head of it is an extra smart fellow."

"But, the trouble with all these gangs is that it is not possible for a man to get together six or seven fellows and keep them from making some blunders, no matter how skillfully he may work the game."

In a quarter of an hour the Englishman returned.

"It is all right!" he answered. "The chief will have a talk with you, and if you make a favorable impression he will let you join the gang."

"Just what I want, and I reckon when the captain comes to talk to me he will see that I am a good all-around man who can be made very useful."

"You have got a tongue in your head—use it to the best of your ability," Yellow Tommy instructed.

Then he led the way into the ranch through the front door which was unlocked and they found themselves in a square hall, in which there were four doors.

A candle stuck in a tin socket on the wall illuminated the hall.

Tommy knocked at the right hand door—first a single knock, then two more quickly repeated.

"How many?" asked a gruff voice from the inside.

"One is sometimes more than enough," Yellow Tommy signaled.

The door opened and the pair went into a plainly furnished apartment.

A big fellow, dressed roughly like a cattle-man, with a rough black beard, which almost completely hid his face, and long coarse hair of the same hue, received the pair.

"Go through that door," he ordered the peddler, pointing to a door at the end of the apartment.

Jerry Green obeyed without a word, and found himself in a small apartment.

There was a desk at the further end, behind which sat a brawny fellow, dressed in a blanket coat and wearing a broad-brimmed slouch hat pulled down over his eyes.

He, too, had a huge black beard and an extraordinary profusion of coarse black hair.

By this time the applicant had come to the conclusion that the hair and beard were both false and assumed to disguise the identity of the wearer.

"Take a chair," said the man in a gruff voice.

The peddler obeyed.

"Hodkins tells me that you are a good all-around crook and that you are anxious to get in with a good gang."

"That is what I want, sir."

"What is your name?"

"Jerry Green; that is my true handle, but among my pals I am known as Jimmy Legs, and if you were to ask any of the authorities of the section a hundred miles north of Fort Smith you would get a mighty highly-flavored

account of the goings on of a gentleman of about my size."

"Hodkins speaks very well of you and I think a good deal of his judgment."

"If you give me a trial I don't think you will regret it."

"How are you in the use of weapons—a good shot?"

"About as good as the average. I don't claim to be no champion marksman, though, you understand."

"No, of course not. It is not expected that you will be."

"How are you off for courage?"

"Well, a man ought not to have to praise himself, but I will say that no man ever saw me funk yet."

"We take desperate risks in this party, and when a man starts in with us in an expedition, the chances are just as good that he will fetch up in the Happy Hunting Grounds before he gets through as that he will come out all right."

"A prospect of that kind doesn't scare me any. I am willing to risk it."

"Another thing: when you join this band you will have to swear to pay implicit obedience to all orders which may be given you."

"That suits all right. I know, of course, as an old hand at this sort of business that the game must be worked that way or else the gang couldn't win."

"The system upon which the band is organized is that the chief knows each member of the organization, yet the members do not know each other," the bearded man explained.

"Well, that seems to me to be a good notion," the peddler remarked.

"The idea is to guard against treachery. The members never see each other unless they are fully disguised, so it is impossible for them to recognize each other."

"It would be a mighty hard matter then it seems to me for a traitor to give all the gang away."

"That is just what we are trying to guard against."

"We never hold a meeting without some important business matter is to be discussed, so the occasions when the band comes together are few and far between."

"I reckon you have got the thing arranged down so blanked fine that the cutest detective in the country would not be able to get on your tracks," the peddler declared, admiringly.

"The idea is to make everything as safe as possible," the outlaw chief replied.

"I will accept you as a member of the band, but you must bear in mind that after you once get in there cannot be any backing out."

"Oh, you will find me right up to the scratch, every time!"

"Now then, when a meeting is decided to be necessary due notice is sent to each member—the time, place, hour and password. It will be this ranch for the present. Suppose you receive a notification that a meeting is to take place to-morrow night: at the appointed time you come, but you bring with you a disguise, and before you come to the door of the ranch you put it on. Then advance, give the password and are admitted."

"Every other member of the band takes the same precaution, so that when the party is all assembled every man is disguised. In order to identify the different members each one has a number pinned on his breast. You will be Number Eight."

"All right; I will remember."

"Of course when I say to you that no two members of the party know each other, that is the supposition, but the rule don't always hold good, as for instance: you and Yellow Tommy are old pals and both of you know that the other belongs to the band."

"Of course, it has to be that way."

"It is possible that some of the other members are also pals in the same way, but the theory holds good."

"Yes, and the idea is a mighty good one it seems to me."

"If the members of the band never see each other without being disguised, then no traitor could swear to the identity of all the party."

"You can bet your life on that!"

"When you depart you will find Yellow Tommy in the outer room," the outlaw

chief announced. "He will give you a mask, a wig, and an old coat which will about cover you all up, so you will be in proper condition to attend to the meeting to-night. That is all. You can go."

The peddler departed.

In the outer room he found Yellow Tommy with the various articles just as the captain had said.

"I told you that he would take you, all right, and now you will stand a chance to come in for some good things," the Englishman declared as he helped the peddler to assume his disguise.

"I tell you that man is a genius, if there ever was one in this world!" Jerry avowed.

"He wasn't born yesterday, and you can bet high on that," was the rejoinder.

And now that the disguise of the other was completed—Yellow Tommy had also put on a similar one—the peddler noticed that the Englishman wore the figure one on his breast.

"Hello, you are Number One! Well, well, you must be mighty high up in the gang."

"Yes, I am not far from the head," Tommy admitted, complacently. "In fact, old boy, I was the man who really suggested the idea of the gang to the captain."

"Oh, is that so?"

"Yes, I knew the captain of old, and understood just what kind of a desperate dog he was; and then, too, I knew he had the brains to run just such a gang, for there's a deal of headwork to it, you comprehend."

"I happened to run across the captain—I hadn't seen him for years; and as the old man always had a good opinion of my judgment, he made no hesitation in telling me just how he was situated."

"He was down on his luck the worst kind of way, and didn't know which way to turn, for, you see, he is an extravagant dog, and when he has money throws it away like a prince."

"He had about come to the end of his rope when we met, and I put him up to the idea of a gang. So he jumped at my idea."

"It seems to me that the meeting was a mighty good thing for both of you!" the peddler inferred.

"Yes, it was; and it has put a heap of ducats in both of our pockets."

"Now then, are you all fixed?"

"Oh, yes, I reckon my dearest friend wouldn't know me with these togs on," the peddler responded, surveying himself admiringly.

"That is the idea, my tulip!" Yellow Tommy explained. "It is the blooming detectives we are looking out for, you know. If there is one there are fifty of the sleuth-hounds on our tracks; but, just so long as we keep our wits about us the chances are big that none of them will be able to do a thing."

"Well, detectives are only men, anyway."

"Certainly! but come on!"

Yellow Tommy led the way through a door at the rear of the apartment, then into an entry and at the end of the passage conducted his companion into a good sized apartment where were men disguised as they were.

CHAPTER XXIII.

PLANNING A RAID.

At the end of the room was a table, and the outlaw chief sat behind it.

There were four chairs on each side of the room ranged along the wall.

All the chairs were occupied by disguised men, rigged out in the false beards, wigs and masks with the exception of the first chair on the right hand and the last chair on the left.

Yellow Tommy motioned to his companion to take the last chair on the left hand, which the peddler did, and he took the vacant one on the right.

"Now our little social circle is complete," the captain announced, as the two men took seats.

"I have called you together to-night to give you warning that there is another enterprise on foot, and I reckon from the way things look that we will secure a good haul."

A grunt of approval came from the masked men as they listened to this news.

"I suppose you all understand the principles upon which this enterprise is run, but it will not do any harm to restate them."

"In the first place, we do not calculate to pull off many jobs, the calculation being to average one about every two months."

"It is the idea to only go into schemes where there is a dead certainty of making big money."

"Unless we know that the cash is there and can be corralled if we work the game rightly, then the job is no good to us."

Again the outlaws grunted their approval.

"Another point; we calculate to always arrange the game so there will not be much doubt about making it a success."

"Well, now to business. This new scheme promises to pan out to the tune of about ten thousand dollars."

The masked men were delighted at this announcement.

"But it is going to be an extremely dangerous job," the chief continued.

"Oh, well, we cannot expect to collar a booty like that without going to some trouble."

"Ten thousand dollars don't grow on every bush, and when a man sets out to gain a prize like that he must expect to work for it," Yellow Tommy declared.

All solemnly nodded approval.

"We shall probably have to fight a pitched battle, but, as the odds will be on our side, beside the advantage of a surprise, we ought to be able to win the game. Each man, therefore, must take particular care in regard to his weapons—to be sure that they are in perfect working order, for a man's life will depend upon that."

"Each one must come provided with a Winchester rifle, a pair of revolvers, and plenty of ammunition, for in the event of our being beaten off there would be a running fight and it would take lots of cartridges."

"And, about your horses: secure the best that money can procure, for in the event of our getting the worst of the fight, our safety will depend upon the speed of our horses."

"When men go into games like the one we are playing they are fools to try and save money on horseflesh," Yellow Tommy declared.

"Keep a still tongue in your heads and don't throw your money away so loosely as to excite the suspicion of some detective sneak that you didn't come honestly by it, and we can go on and pull in the ducats. So-long!"

The chief departed by a door at the back of the table by which he sat.

The masked men all rose and one by one, at intervals of a minute, left the apartment by the front door.

They went in regular rotation, the man who sat nearest to the door, opposite to the peddler, going first.

Jerry Green, not being up to this order of procedure did not move.

"Now then, my blooming tulip, in a minute's time we will get out," he announced as the door closed behind the last man.

The idea of this here sort of a procession is for each man to have time enough to get out of the way of the next one," the Englishman explained.

"Your captain is a genius!" the peddler declared. "I never heard of as nicely arranged game as this in my time."

"Oh, yes, he is up to snuff. He is a little doubtful about you though."

"How so?"

"He is afraid that you hav'n't got sand enough to stand the steel when the critical time comes."

"He will find that I am all right."

"That is what I told him."

"When do I get the word about the next meeting?"

"I will give it to you, but you will not get more than three hours' notice, maybe; but, come! let's be off!"

In the outer room the two removed their disguises, and after they got to the corral Yellow Tommy showed the peddler a hiding-place where he could stow his rig away.

Then they mounted their horses and started to return to the town.

"Oh, by the way, you were speaking about getting a call to the next meeting," the Englishman spoke, abruptly, as they rode along.

"Yes, I wanted to be posted, you know," Jerry Green replied.

"Well, the next meeting will be for the purpose of going upon the expedition, and as I said, the notice will be a short one," Yellow Tommy explained.

"I spoke of hours, but the odds are big that it will be more likely to be minutes than hours."

"You see, the captain is always on the guard against treachery."

"Suppose there was a man in the gang weak-minded enough to make a deal with the detectives; if five or six hours' notice were given then it would give the traitor a chance to post the detectives."

"They would have an opportunity, too, to get their forces together so as to make it particularly warm for us."

"Yes, that is so," the peddler admitted. "I never thought of that."

"Very likely not, but it takes the captain though to keep these little things in mind."

"Then, too, the way in which he works the game the chances are that the instructions to be at a certain spot do not amount to anything."

"When you get there, instead of finding the gang assembled, you may find one man who tells you to go to another place."

"This captain of yours is the biggest genius in his line that I ever heard of, and I don't wonder he has made a success out of the band."

"He is a king-pin and no mistake," Yellow Tommy assented.

And now they were at the town.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A QUARREL SOME STRANGER.

THE peddler felt extremely well satisfied with the progress which he had made, and after he retired to his bunk in the little corner he fell to meditating upon the situation.

"It will be an extremely difficult matter for any one to get at this band, for all possible precautions seem to have been made against a discovery."

"It will be slow work, and, I fancy, take a long time unless some unforeseen accident happens."

"There is always the chance of that, though. I have made a good beginning, and if I play my cards carefully and well the chances are that, in the long run, I will do the trick."

And then the peddler turned over and went to sleep—sleeping as sleeps the man without a care on his mind.

Jerry Green was around town as usual the next day, and he and Yellow Tommy were together a great deal.

After supper the pair stood in front of Dave Fox's Keno Palace conversing, when, up the street came an elongated cowboy—a man fully six feet high, but, being thin in flesh, seemed to be even taller than he was.

He had apparently been drinking, and was talking to himself as he advanced.

When he reached the Keno Palace he came to an abrupt halt, glanced at the peddler with a searching expression, then placing his hands upon his hips, exclaimed:

"May I be cut up into rawhide ropes if I don't think that you are the very man I am arter!"

As he yelled this out in a loud and angry tone, the words interested all citizens in the neighborhood, and at once they gathered around the group to see the anticipated "fun."

The peddler looked at the man in astonishment, for he was a perfect stranger.

Jerry Green had a good memory, and was sure he had never met this fellow anywhere.

"You remember me, I reckon?" the stranger exclaimed, threateningly.

"No, I don't! I never saw you before!" the peddler declared.

"Oh, come now, that is too thin—that won't wash!" the cowboy protested. "You know me well enough, but the trouble is you are afraid of being called to an account!" the cowboy declared, menacingly.

"You are afraid of being called upon to step up to the captain's office and settle, and that is what is the matter with Hannah!"

And, as he made the declaration, the tall

herder brought his muscular hand down upon his sinewy thigh in a slap which sounded like a pistol-shot.

"You have made some mistake; I don't know you," the peddler persisted.

"Oh, come! draw it mild!" the cowboy enjoined; "you might as well tell me that I hain't got the sight of my own eyes!"

"You have made a mistake, and that is all there is to it," the peddler averred.

He saw that the man was in liquor, and inclined to pick a quarrel, but, as Jerry Green was a peaceable man, and always avoided a quarrel if it was possible for him so to do, he tried to do so now.

"Nary a mistake!" roared the cowboy, hotly. "And don't you try to stuff any such nonsense as that down me or we will be apt to have trouble, right now and here! I know you, and you know me, and you can't get out of it. Did you ever hear of the Three Star Ranch?"

"Yes, I have heard of such a place but I don't know where it is," the peddler replied.

"It is the boss ranch of the upper Santa Cruis valley. It lays away over any place from hyer to thar. It is the boss ranch and I am the boss cowboy of that ranch; but that isn't neither hyer nor thar. It is this little settlement with you that I am arter."

"You are the medicine-peddler, ain't ye? The man who travels around sellin' a double distilled extract of Gila Monster and perarie rattlesnake."

"Oh, no, there isn't any rattlesnake in it," the other protested.

"Thar is, you blamed snake, and your miserable stuff came near poisonin' me! Yes, sir! I like to have died!"

And the cowboy put on a woe-begone look, so utterly ridiculous that the crowd fairly howled with laughter.

"Oh, you fellers kin haw-haw all you like, but I kin tell you that it was a blamed serious matter!" the cowboy protested, indignantly.

"And jest to think on it, feller-citizens, the idea that the life of a man like myself, one of the greatest cow-punchers that ever roped a steer should be put in peril."

"It is a State's Prison act, that is what it is!"

"Well, you may have got a bottle of my medicine from somebody, but you certainly never got it from me, for I never saw you before in my life, and I have a mighty good memory for faces, and if I ever had seen you I wouldn't have forgotten you," the peddler declared.

"You are the very man who sold the stuff to me!" the cowboy responded, "and I told you my name at the time, too."

"Oh, no!"

"Oh, yes; it is Nicholson—Hank Nicholson—Handsome Hank Nicholson of the Three Star Ranch, the boss cowboy of the upper Santa Cruis valley!"

And, as he made the announcement, he struck an attitude, intended to be dignified and impressive but was in reality so comic that the bystanders again roared with laughter.

By this time a large crowd had gathered, for it was apparent that the cowboy had drank enough liquor to make him bull-headed and bellicose.

He had got it into his head that the peddler had wronged him; he was anxious for satisfaction and it looked as if there would be a fight, unless the peddler crawled, and those in the crowd who remembered how the medicine-vender handled Beapole Perkins when that worthy went on the war-path against Jerry Green were of the opinion that the peddler would not show the white feather.

"You are all wrong!" the peddler said in his quiet and easy way. "I never was on the Three Star Ranch in my life—I never sold you a bottle of medicine, and if I did, it would not have done you harm, but good."

"You are a liar from Llarville!" the tall cowboy roared in a rage.

"Your blamed stuff nearly poisoned me and I swore that the first time I came across you I would have satisfaction," and Nicholson shook his fist in the face of the peddler.

"Do you see that—and do you know what I am going to do?"

"Have a fight, I reckon," responded the peddler with a smile.

"You are right for a thousand ducats! I am going to smash you as there never was a man smashed in this hyer town! So, look out for me now—for I am a coming, bloody murder—whoop la!" and with a wild Indian yell the cow-puncher rushed upon the peddler.

But, Jerry Green was not unprepared, and nimbly evading the headlong rush of the cowboy, he dodged under Nicholson's arm, and, as the latter turned in a clumsy way to pursue him, the peddler caught him a right hand lick under the ear which fairly staggered his would be assailant.

Then, quick to improve his advantage the medicine man went at the cowboy like a wildcat; his fists played a tattoo all over the body of the amazed Nicholson.

The cowboy retreated in dismay, then got his legs tangled just as the peddler landed a heavy left-hander on his jaw and the force of the stroke sent him over on his back, a clean knock down.

The bystanders yelled in delight; this sort of amusement was exactly to their taste. Their only fear was that the peddler had set so fierce a pace that the cowboy would never be able to last.

They were right in their conjecture; the man from the Three Star Ranch had already got enough.

He lay on his back for a minute or so, staring up at the sky, apparently meditating over the situation; then he rose to a sitting posture.

A goodly number of great American jokers were in the crowd, of course, and they began to yell "time!" "come up to the scratch!" "second round!" and similar pertinent words.

"I ain't lost any time!" the punched puncher observed with a great deal of dignity. "And if any of you fellers have you had better go chase yourselves after it as soon as you kin."

Then Nicholson rose to his feet and cast a look of wonder at his opponent.

"Wal, I want to remark that I have seen some frauds in my time, but you beat the deck!" he declared. "No man would pick you out for a warrior, but you are on the light bigger'n a wolf."

"And I want you to understand, too, that this is the biggest sell on me that was ever played on mortal man!" the cowboy declared in an indignant tone. "I reckoned, when I saw you and made up my mind to go into this thing, that I was going to have the softest kind of a snap—a reg'lar picnic, in fact; but, b'gosh! I never had an idee knocked out of me so blamed quick afore sence I was hatched—no, sirree!"

The bystanders looked at each other in surprise, for they couldn't make sense out of the fellow's words.

"What do you mean—what are you driving at, anyway?" the peddler wished to know.

"Why, my being roped into this hyer attack on you!" the cowboy replied in an aggrieved tone.

"Do you s'pose I would have gone into the muss if I had had any idee what kind of a warrior you were? Do you s'pose five dollars would have been any inducement for me to expose myself to the risk of such a hammering as you have jest given me?"

All the listeners were amazed.

"Do you mean to say that somebody paid you five dollars to attack me?" the peddler asked, completely surprised.

"That is a sure enuff fact—I am giving it to you as straight as a string," Nicholson asserted, with a great deal of drunken dignity.

"Who was it?" was the peddler's natural inquiry.

"Blamed if I know!" the cowboy answered. "He was a stranger to me; and this is how it was: when I came into the town to day I stopped to get a drink at a saloon at the end of the street. This cuss was in thar, a medium sized man dressed like a miner, with a big black beard. He axed me to drink with him and we had three or four rounds together; then he told me that he was looking for a man to do a little job for him."

"Well, I told him that I was allers open-ed for a deal, and he explained about how he had been nearly p'isoned by your medicine

—said he was as weak as a cat, and he wanted satisfaction and he reckoned that it would be wuth five dollars to him if he could get some good man to take hold of you and wipe the earth with you."

"I was jest blamed fool enuff to think it was a snap, and I went for it, and I want to rise to remark that it was the lowest down, meanest trick that was ever played on a decent white man."

"And the blamed bearded cuss led me into it so darned slick, too, for he said you didn't amount to shucks, anyway, and that any half-way good man could get away with you without any trouble."

"Why, old man," he said to me, clapping me on the shoulder, 'he will be jest pie for a good man like you are!'"

"Then he flashed the five dollar bill at me and I grabbed it!"

"What is the result?"

"I've got a hammering that I wouldn't take for no man for a fifty dollar note. I have made a complete ass of myself and I reckon that I will never be able to do any blowing in this town hereafter."

"It was a low mean trick, and if I ever meet that blamed bearded cuss thar will be guns pulled."

"And now, feller citizens, I reckon you will have to excuse me while I haul off for repairs. It will cost me a small fortune for arnica and liniment. So long!"

And the discomfited puncher departed.

The citizens were much astonished; why any one should go to the trouble to hire a bravo to thrash the peddler was a mystery.

With the departure of the cowboy the crowd dispersed, and Jerry Green and Yellow Tommy strolled up the street together.

"I can put you up to the time of day about this affair," the Englishman announced.

"Can you?"

"Yes, it was the captain put up this job on you. You know, I told you that he had doubts about your sand and so he got this fellow to try you. But, you are O. K. now, with the boss."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE DUEL.

JERRY GREEN waited patiently for the order to join the gang, but day after day melted away and it did not come.

"The thing ain't ripe," Yellow Tommy assured; "the captain never goes ahead until he has everything good and ready."

The passing away of the time brought the recovery to the gambler, Curly Masterton, which he so eagerly desired.

The doctor told him that he was all right, and could proceed as usual—of course, bearing in mind that his arm was still tender, and must not be subjected to any unusual strain or exertion.

The first thing that Curly Masterton did was to dispatch a gambler friend of his with a message to Hickory Bill Jackson.

"If Mr. Jackson will find it convenient to be at the little prairie to the north of the town at five o'clock to-morrow morning, Mr. Curly Masterton will take great pleasure in meeting him there."

"The weapons to be revolvers, and the distance one hundred feet."

"If Mr. Hickory Jackson objects to these conditions, Mr. Curly Masterton will be pleased to change them, or, in fact, agree to anything reasonable."

"That is all right!" the old mountain man responded.

"Thar ain't a thing that I object to; in fact, if I had the arranging of the thing I couldn't have suited myself better."

The gambler expressed himself as being delighted to hear this, and then departed.

"But, I say, Hickory, really, you know, I ought not to allow you to fight this man!" Vandermiller exclaimed.

"It is really my quarrel, and I ought to meet him."

"Not by a jugful!" the old scout responded. "My quarrel with him goes back a dozen years, and I have always intended to salivate the cuss on the first convenient opportunity, but, somehow I never happened to run across the critter until now."

"And I kin jest tell you, Mr. Vandermiller, I wouldn't let any man take the job out of my hands for a good thousand dollars."

"No, sir—eel a thousand dollars wouldn't be no kind of temptation.

"I have got an idee, you see, that fate has designed for me to wipe this man out.

"He has been going on now for a good many years, and has always had the luck to come on top in all his fights.

"But the main reason for that is because he has played a low-down tricky part.

"When he knew that he was going to have it out with a man he always contrived to start in with the advantage on his side, and so come out ahead.

"But he never met a man like myself in his life; this friend of mine of whom I spoke, was nothing but a greenhorn compared to me.

"For thirty odd years now I have been a mountain-man, and when I was out on an expedition thar was hardly a moment, day or night, when my life was not in danger.

"That sort of life made me a fighter, no scrapper in the street of a camp, but a man who had to depend upon his abilities as a warrior for a two or three days' siege, with a hundred red devils surrounding him, eager for his blood.

"And when a man who has been trained in that way meets one of these miserable wolves of gamblers, you can better believe that he has a big advantage."

Vander Miller did not attempt to discuss the question further. He saw that the old mountain-man had the most implicit faith that Heaven had picked him out to be the executioner of Curly Masterton, and realized that nothing which he could say would induce the scout to change his belief.

Masterton was a man who did not believe in anyone's hiding their light under a bushel, as the saying is. When he had a duel on hand he was always eager and anxious that the whole town should be acquainted with the fact; he was nothing if not theatrical, and delighted to pose in the sight of a crowd.

So, as soon as the conditions of the duel were arranged he immediately proceeded to tell all his friends and acquaintances about the matter.

It did not take news of this kind long to travel, and in a couple of hours there were few people in Red Water City who were not acquainted with the particulars of the personal affair which was to come off for their edification.

The result of this was that when the duelists with their friends made their appearance on the ground they found about all the male inhabitants of Red Water City out to see the "gun jamboree."

This suited Curly and he laughingly said to his friend:

"There are going to be plenty of witnesses to see that there is fair play, but I don't mind, the more the merrier."

It did not take long to prepare for the contest; the conditions were very simple.

The duelists were to stand a hundred feet apart; the signal for the contest to begin was to be a pistol shot, fired by Colonel Boone, who had agreed to act as master of ceremonies, he being acceptable to both parties.

After the pistol shot the duelists were to be at liberty to advance and fire as often as they liked.

The men got into position, and the bystanders formed a line on both sides, thus forming a sort of an avenue.

"Are you ready, gentlemen?" the colonel called out.

"All ready!" Masterton responded.

"O. K.!" cried the mountain veteran.

"Look out then! Ready!"

Crack!

The sharp report of the pistol sounded on the clear air.

Up came the arms of the duelists.

Crack—crack!

The two reports were so near together that the second sounded like the echo of the first.

Hickory Bill Jackson never stirred, but Masterton threw up his hands and then dropped in his tracks.

"By heaven! he is hard hit!" Boone exclaimed.

The Kentuckian had had a deal of experience in this line and so was capable of forming an accurate opinion.

For a moment the spectators stared, then they drew a long breath.

Most of them realized that death had come to one of the duelists.

The gambler had indeed fought his last fight, and, with all his sins on his head, had gone to his last account!

Colonel Boone, with the doctor, made an examination, to find that the sport had been shot directly in the center of the forehead, right above the eyes!

The wound, of course, had produced immediate death, and it is doubtful if the gambler had been conscious of being hurt.

"The thing is ended, Hickory," Colonel Boone announced. "The man is dead."

"Yes, I reckoned so," the old man replied, in a matter of fact way.

"And you got off without a scratch!" the colonel said.

"Not by a jugful!" Old Hickory declared.

"The sport plugged me in the shoulder, and I rather fancy that I have got a tolerably ugly mark on me."

An inspection revealed that this was the case.

Hickory, with the craft of an old Indian-fighter, had stood sideways, so as to present as small a surface as possible as a target, and to this fact he owed his escape.

Masterton's bullet had just plowed through the outside of his shoulder, producing an ugly trail, but nothing more.

"A miss is as good as a mile," the old scout remarked, when the doctor made known to him the extent of his injuries.

"That is true enough, but if Masterton had been lucky enough to send his bullet a couple of inches in another direction, you would not have got off so well."

"But he didn't do it, doctor, and it is what we do that counts, not the things we don't," the veteran remarked, as with Vander Miller, who had acted as his second, and Colonel Boone, he turned to leave the field.

The citizens were amazed at the result of the fight, for the gambler had carried matters with so high a hand for so long a time that the majority of the men of the town had come to regard him as invincible—a champion against whom no one stood a chance.

But, he had been conquered by a plain, old fellow, who did not assume to be a killer of men.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE SIGNAL COMES.

YELLOW TOMMY and the peddler, Jerry Green, loafed around town, waiting for the morning.

"It will come in time," the Englishman declared.

"Don't you worry about that, but as I said before the thing has got to be ripe."

On the night of the day on which took place the duel between the gambler and the old scout, the pair had been in the Keno Palace until nine o'clock, trying their luck with varying success at the fascinating game.

Then they came out and walked up the street to the hotel.

Just before they reached the colonel's place they were accosted by a roughly dressed man whose face was concealed by a full beard, and this, with the fact that he wore an old broad-brimmed slouch hat pulled down over his eyes, almost completely hid his features.

"Say, pards, kin I speak a word with you?" he asked.

"Of course!" Yellow Tommy answered.

"Would you mind coming down to the hotel corral whar no one will be apt to get on to us?"

"Oh, no."

"Much obliged."

The man led the way to the corral, but went around to the back of it.

There three horses were tethered.

"The time has come, boys," the bearded man said with an entire change of voice.

"Mount, and we will be off!"

It was the outlaw chief.

"We have a long ride before us, and will need all the time we can get."

Yellow Tommy and the peddler obeyed the command, and when the three were in the saddle they rode off, taking to the open prairie so as to avoid observation.

First they went to the north, and then the outlaw chief abruptly changed their course

and circled around to the south, after they had ridden for a short time.

The peddler was well posted in regard to the country and so he understood that they had got around to the south trail leading down the Santa Cruis valley.

It was a fine night for an expedition of this kind.

There was a new moon which offered light enough to enable all the surrounding objects to be distinctly seen.

"Have you got Number Eight's sign for him, all right?" the outlaw chief asked, abruptly.

"Yes, O. K.!" Yellow Tommy answered.

"I have got my revolvers and rifle all right, but you didn't give me any time to-night to get the rifle," the peddler said.

"How about your revolvers?" the leader asked.

"I have got them all right."

"Any spare cartridges?"

"Yes, fifty."

"That will do."

"Hadn't he better put on his disguise?" Yellow Tommy asked. "I have them in my saddle-bags."

"Yes, for some one might come along who knows him, the outlaw chief replied. "And the man would be sure to wonder where he was going and who were the men he was with."

Yellow Tommy produced a wig, beard, and broad-brimmed hat.

After the peddler assumed these articles the change in his appearance was complete.

No one could possibly have recognized him.

For an hour the three rode on in silence, going at a good gallop which took them over the ground in fine shape.

As they rode on the peddler meditated over the situation.

And the more he thought about the matter, the greater became his admiration for the way in which the affair had been managed.

He was a stranger and had not been tried.

Suppose that he was a detective in disguise who had contrived to gain admission to the band for the purpose of breaking it up?

If so, then he would have had a lot of other detectives ready to follow on the track the moment a movement was made.

But the way this expedition had been arranged all the detectives in the world would have been at fault, for it would not have been possible for the keenest of them to follow on the trail.

"Oh, he is a genius!" the peddler muttered to himself. "But the greatest geniuses make mistakes sometimes, and then men who are not so smart succeed in getting the best of them."

A half-hour more and the three quitted the south road and took a side trail which ran up into the foot-hills of the Santa Cruis Mountains.

It was a narrow road at the beginning and by the time it had got well up into the foot-hills of the old mountain range, it was but little more than an Indian trail.

The three were compelled to go on in single file, Indian style, for there was not room for two horses to go abreast.

Then the three came to a point where the trail ran through a dense growth of scrubby timber.

When the timber was passed a little vale, nestled down in the rugged foot-hills, stood revealed.

It was a very small valley, not over a thousand feet long, and completely shut in by the hills.

Through the valley ran a little mountain brook and in the center of the vale by the side of the mountain streamlet stood a log cabin.

In front of the cabin now burned a huge log fire and five men reclined upon it, all of them smoking, and apparently enjoying themselves chatting together.

It was the rendezvous of the gang.

A couple of them sprung to their feet and, when the three dismounted, led away the horses.

"Well, boys, I see that you are making yourselves comfortable," the outlaw chief remarked as he took a seat upon a soft grassy knoll, and rested his back against a convenient tree-trunk.

All of the men wore their beards and masks, yet from the familiar way in which

they were conversing the peddler came to the conclusion that the statement that the men did not know each other was a fiction.

It was a very good yarn but it wasn't the truth.

"The night was a little chilly and we thought we might as well make a fire; then too it is so much more cheerful-like, you know," one of the outlaws remarked.

The peddler pricked up his ears.

He knew the voice.

Oh, yes, there could not be any mistake about it.

The man who spoke was the English blacksmith, Martin Butterick.

The Englishman had a peculiar thick voice and any one who once heard it would not be apt to forget it.

The peddler was not astonished at this discovery for he had anticipated that the blacksmith was a member of the band.

"There is where the money came from that he threw away so lavishly. I don't doubt that old Solomons was right; it was his money which he squandered when he tried to break the faro bank."

"This is a new recruit, boys, Number Eight," the outlaw chief remarked, after the three dismounted, and the bearded men had taken charge of the horses.

The members of the gang nodded their heads in salutation.

Tommy and the peddler selected a comfortable position and reclined upon the earth after the fashion of the rest.

"I suppose you think, boys, that this is a little something out of the common," the outlaw chief intimated.

"Yes, it is, rather," Yellow Tommy acknowledged.

"We reckon, though, that you have a mighty good reason for it," observed one of the bearded men, a tall, thin, lathy like fellow.

"You are right, Number Three; there is a good and sufficient reason for it," the leader of the band declared.

"In the first place I calculate to make the attack about eleven o'clock in the morning, but in order to get to our ambush without running the risk of exciting any attention it will be necessary for us to move early, not later than five o'clock."

The attentive members of the band all nodded their heads in acquiescence.

"Yes, eight of us moving along a public trail, either in a body or singly, would be certain to meet somebody, and then the question as to what we were doing would immediately come up," Tommy remarked.

"No doubt about it," the outlaw chief responded, "but I have so arranged the matter that we have gained our rendezvous here without attracting any one's attention."

"Now, then, we can have a good night's rest, have a chance to examine our weapons, and get into first rate trim for the enterprise."

"You have planned the thing well; there is no mistake about that, captain," Yellow Tommy asserted; "but, I'd like to ask, do you mind letting on now just what kind of a game we are going to play?"

"Oh, no; now that we are within a couple of miles of the ground, all prepared to make the swoop, I don't see any reason why you all shouldn't know what we are going to try to do," the outlaw chief replied.

The maskers all bent forward eagerly, to listen.

"In the first place, I suppose you have all heard of the Silver Mountain Mine situated in the Santa Cruz range," the chief assumed.

"Yes, that is the mine they have been having such a fight over," Yellow Tommy observed.

"Yes; it is a very valuable property, and one set of sharps have been trying to freeze out another set of sharps. But, now, the fighters have come to a compromise and everything is all right again. Meantime, while this struggle has been going on, the wages of the men in the works have not been properly paid, and so the result is that over ten thousand dollars will be needed to square things up."

"Ten thousand dollars!" exclaimed Tommy. "That is a large amount of money."

"You bet!" exclaimed Number Three, and all the rest of the men assented.

"The hands, tired of waiting for their

money, threatened to play the mischief with the works if their claims were not settled; but, as the contending parties had arranged their fight, there was no trouble about getting the money, for the mine has always paid handsomely. So a party will leave Red Water City to-morrow morning with ten thousand dollars in their possession.

"It will be a well-armed party, of course, but just how many men there will be in the outfit, is more than I can say."

"The chances are that there will not be more than a dozen, I should think," Yellow Tommy remarked.

"I agree with you. I don't think there will be more than a dozen in the outfit; but, even supposing there are fifteen or sixteen we will have the advantage of the surprise and ought to be able to get away with them."

A half a dozen of the men spoke in regard to this point, and all expressed their confidence in being strong enough to whip the mine guard.

"So, that is the lay-out, boys," the chief concluded, "and time will tell whether we can work our trick or not."

The conference being ended, the men adjourned to the cabin, where were a lot of buffalo-ropes, and bunked down for the night.

A sentinel was posted, who was relieved every two hours, and the outlaws slept soundly.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE AMBUSCADE.

ALL members of the band were up at day-break.

They had brought a store of provisions with them, and there were cooking utensils in the cabin, so it did not take them long to provide a substantial breakfast.

After the meal they mounted their horses and rode to the Santa Cruz trail, down which they proceeded for a mile.

Then they came to an ideal spot for an ambushade.

A small valley, thickly dotted with clumps of evergreens, afforded ample concealment for fifty men.

"This will do," the chief announced, as he drew rein in order to survey the vantage of the ground — "this will answer admirably. If we can't do the trick here then it will not be possible for us to do it at all."

"The first thing is to find some secure place to tether the horses, and it must be some little distance from the trail, too, for fear of the horses neighing."

"I reckon it will not bother us much to arrange that matter all right," Tommy opined.

"There seems to be a sort of a blind trail here leading off to the right," one of the band observed, the tall, lanky fellow, Number Three.

They followed Number Three, and in about five minutes came to a little open glade, just the place they sought, for the purpose.

"This will do—light down, boys!" the outlaw chief commanded.

The gang dismounted, and tethering their horses securely, all returned on foot to the road.

The captain proceeded to place his men in ambush, and in five minutes no trace of human presence could be seen.

The men were concealed behind the evergreen clumps, stretched out at full length, the most of them, prepared to make themselves comfortable while they waited.

The captain had calculated that the convoy party would be likely to reach this point between nine and ten o'clock; so when the hour of nine approached, he cautioned his men to be on the alert.

"They are liable to put in an appearance at any moment now," he warned.

While the gang had waited in ambush, at least twenty people had gone along the trail, some to the north, others to the south, but, as they had come in parties of twos and threes the watchers knew they were not of the party for whom they waited.

At half-past nine the treasure guard rode down into the valley.

The outlaw chief having a position which

commanded a view of the trail for an eighth of a mile, had ample time to prepare for the attack.

There were nine men in the convoy, and at their head rode Judge John MacKelway.

The judge, having been appointed receiver of the mine, was settling all matters in dispute and therefore had charge of the treasure.

By Judge MacKelway's side rode Big Dave Hagerman, the deputy-sheriff; while a fully armed man, carrying his Winchester rifle across the pommel of his saddle, rode on each side of the judge and the deputy-sheriff, thus riding four abreast.

Then came a Mexican in charge of one of the patient little donkeys common to the region, and, as this animal was equipped with saddlebags the inference was plain that the burro carried the money.

Behind the donkey came four more well-armed guards.

The judge and the deputy-sheriff were chatting together, without a thought of danger when the surprise came.

Out from behind the clumps of evergreen stepped the eight outlaws, making their appearance as abruptly and silently as so many ghosts.

Each man had his rifle to his shoulder and the treasure party were completely covered.

"Halt!" commanded the brigand chief in gruff voice, as he stepped into the trail.

"Don't attempt to use a weapon, for resistance will cost every man of you his life!"

There was no gainsaying the danger of that very result.

Judge MacKelway was quick to speak.

"All right—all right! don't do anything in a hurry!" he exclaimed; "we'll consider your hold-up!"

The judge had never been noted for his courage.

The deputy-sheriff, Dave Hagerman, although a big fellow with a blustering manner, was one of those who preferred to go in to a fight with the odds on his side; but now, realizing that he had been taken at a disadvantage, he was not anxious to bring on a conflict.

The armed men on the right and left, although fellows with plenty of "sand," yet when they saw that neither Judge MacKelway, nor the deputy-sheriff appeared to have any disposition to show fight, were not "on the fight."

"Dismount, judge, and take the weapons away from your men," the outlaw captain commanded; "put the guns down in a heap on the ground."

The frightened old lawyer dismounted with alacrity. He had been caught in a death-trap and was desirous of getting out of it without personal danger.

So the deputy-sheriff was the first one he disarmed.

"I say, judge, this is the toughest kind of a deal," Hagerman growled, as with great reluctance he surrendered his weapons.

"Yes, these strangers have managed to get the deadwood on us in a way I despise," the lawyer responded with a gloomy shake of the head, "but, all we can do is to grin and bear it."

"I reckon you are right about that," Hagerman acquiesced.

All the convoy gave up their arms with a bad grace, but this did not trouble the outlaws at all.

After the arms were deposited on the ground the judge turned inquiringly to the outlaw chief.

"All dismount!" the masked leader now ordered.

The men of the outfit did so.

"Do you see that single oak?" the captain asked, and he pointed to a tree growing some fifty feet away to the right.

"Yes," answered MacKelway.

"I want you all to go over there and take a seat under that tree, but tether your horses together before you do it."

It only took a few minutes to arrange this job, and then the men started for the tree.

One of the outlaws had advanced and taken charge of the burro, and two more took the horses, gathered up the arms, dismounted and rode off, the horses, arms and the donkey all going with them.

"Gentlemen, I shall have to ask you to

wait patiently for half an hour," the outlaw captain informed his guests; "at the end of that time you will be free to depart. As I have found it necessary to confiscate your horses, you will have to trust to shank's mare, but the walking is good, and I know that a little thing like that will not trouble you."

"I reckon we will be able to live through it," the judge rejoined grimly; "but, I say, my man, you are running a mighty big risk in undertaking a job of this sort, for the whole country will be up after you and it is almost certain that in the long run, you will be hunted down."

"Oh, well, we have got to take our chances of that," the outlaw captain replied carelessly. "This is a big country, you know, and it is not so easy a matter to hunt a man down as it appears to be."

All the outlaws had now disappeared with the exception of the chief and two who had come to his side.

"Well, I can tell you that I wouldn't be in your boots for more thousands of dollars than you have secured," the lawyer announced with assumed bravado.

"No doubt about that, for you would be the last man in the world to go in for a game of this kind."

At this time Tommy rode up with three spare horses, and the outlaws mounted.

"Now, gents, keep quiet here, for about ten minutes more; then you are free to go where you like. So long! See you again one of these days, maybe!" and the three rogues rode off as leisurely as if on parade.]

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE FLIGHT OF THE GANG.

WHILE the outlaw chief had been talking with the old lawyer the members of the gang had not been idle.

The saddle-bags on the burro had been transferred to one of the outlaw's steeds, which had been brought up within a few hundred feet of the valley; the evergreens had sheltered the movement; then the horses belonging to the treasure party had been taken around to the trail, so far away that the owners were not conscious of the fact, and turned loose, each horse getting a good cut with the whip as he received his freedom.

The result of this treatment was that the beasts went galloping up the road in the direction of their home, Red White City.

The arms were divided among the raiders; and it was not until these maneuvers were performed that the horses were brought to the outlaw chief and his companions.

As soon as they were in the saddle they rode away at a good pace, going through the foot-hills, avoiding the main trails, until they came to one trail twenty miles to the south which apparently led right up into the heart of the Santa Cruz mountains.

This they followed, up—up, and then, turning abruptly, they went through a defile which pierced the crest of the old mountain range.

The result of this movement was that the horsemen came out on the other side of the mountain, fully forty miles from the scene of the robbery.

The horses were about played out when the fugitives drew rein in a heavily-wooded valley.

At some remote period a settler had dwelt there, for there was a small log-cabin, and evidences of an attempt at farming.

Some lonely man, weary with his fellow-being, had resolved to settle down and live and die afar from the rest of the world.

That he had not tarried long the state of the improvements showed.

The outlaw leader evidently had an extensive knowledge of the country or else he would not have been so familiar with its obscure localities.

It was evident that the route had been carefully planned for there was a store of buffalo robes in this cabin and some cooking utensils.

Glad indeed were the riders to dismount, for a forty-mile ride over the rough mountain trails was a test of the endurance of men, the most of whom could not boast of their riding abilities.

As soon as the brigands dismounted they hastened to get something to eat for they were almost starved.

After the meal was disposed of the outlaw captain proceeded to business.

The saddle-bags of the burro, which were locked were cut open and the money they contained spread upon the grass.

There were just exactly ten thousand dollars.

The eyes of the gang glistened as they surveyed the booty which they had won with so little trouble.

The captain divided the spoils; an even share to each man and an extra one to the chief, which was confessedly an extremely fair arrangement.

"Well, boys, we have kenoeed again, and this time the pot was certainly well worth the winning," the captain remarked.

"Now, then, if we can be as lucky in evading pursuit and detection this time as on the previous occasion we may thank our lucky stars."

"I don't see any reason why we shouldn't, for this lift has been planned more carefully than the others, I think. The prize is secured on one side of the Santa Cruz range while we join the world again on the other."

"The only bad thing about the matter is the delay at the cabin on account of the horses," Yellow Tommy decided. "We must give the brutes time to rest before asking more of them."

"In reality we ought not to make a start until morning, making a delay of fifteen or sixteen hours," the chief concluded.

"Now, calculate the chances and the time. At about ten o'clock the MacKelway party started to return to Red Water City; they can't make the town before one o'clock, do their best."

"Then the sheriff must be notified and a posse summoned, and, as the posse must be a powerful one to give chase to such a band as ours, it will take a couple of hours more before a start is made."

"That brings the time up to three o'clock. Another hour to reach the scene of the robbery. That is four o'clock, and there is not much left of the day."

"If the sheriff should have in his outfit a tracker smart enough to trail us, it would take some time for the party to cover the ground which we have covered, and if they came directly on our tracks it would not be possible for them to reach this spot before eight or nine in the morning and by that time we will be off each man pursuing a different road so that it will be impossible for the most skillful tracker to do any work."

"Yes, when you come to figure the thing down the chances are about a hundred to one in our favor," Yellow Tommy inferred.

"Not a doubt about it!" exclaimed big, brawny Number Two whom the peddler had decided to be the blacksmith, Martin Butterick.

"Oh, we are all right!" assured lanky Number Three. "We got the cash without any trouble, and we will get away with it, too."

So the outlaws made themselves as comfortable as possible at their cabin rendezvous. An ample stock of salt pork and "hard tack" had been provided, and this, with plenty of coffee, kept hunger away.

After a daybreak breakfast the remount was ordered, and all rode to the main trail. There, however, they separated, each man going off by himself, but all heading to the north.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A VALUABLE RECRUIT.

THE judge and his men remained under the tree for fully twenty minutes after the outlaws disappeared before they moved.

"These fellows have treated us all right, apart from stealing the cash, and we must do the square thing by them," the judge observed.

"You must remember, boys, that we were helpless in their power, and if they had wanted to go through us and take all our valuables, we could not have helped it."

"That is so," the deputy sheriff assented.

"But they were after big game and despised any low-down work."

"Now we will be going," the judge announced.

"It is something of a tramp to Red Water City, but probably we can send word by

some one and have horses come out to meet us."

Hardly had the words been spoken when a couple of ranchers approached on the up trail at a round gallop.

It did not take long to explain what had occurred; whereupon the ranchers pushed on at once at their best speed for Red Water City.

So the party only had to trust to shank's mare for a little over an hour, when they were met by an outfit of horses.

The sheriff, Jim Peters, had come along with the horses, anxious to get all particulars of the affair as soon as possible.

The story was soon told him.

"Well, blame me! if this gang don't beat anything of the kind I ever heard of!" the sheriff declared.

"They fix the thing so that it is as easy as rolling off a log, and the men they go for don't stand any more chance than if they were a lot of blind puppies!"

"Well, sheriff, that is putting it very strongly, but not too strong, for it is the truth," the old lawyer assented.

"There will have be an extra big effort made to catch this gang, and I will do it, too, if it takes a leg!" and the sheriff spoke with almost fierce determination.

Red Water Water City was all excitement when the party reached there, for the ranchers had told the story of the robbery and the citizens had ample time to talk the matter over.

Mayor Thompson was particularly indignant.

"I tell you what it is, sheriff, we must spare no expense to hunt this gang down and break it up!" he urged.

"By all odds they are the boldest set of rascals I ever heard of, and it would be an everlasting disgrace to this section if we did not capture the scoundrels."

"I will do my very best—you can depend upon that, Mr. Mayor!" the sheriff replied.

"Oh, yes, Peters; I know you will. I have the utmost confidence in you," the mayor assumed.

"Now, then, you want to get a good posse together—ten men I should think would be enough."

"Yes, ten will be enough—ten good men," the sheriff replied; "a larger number would be in the way."

"And I suggest that when you take the field you make preparation to remain out for two or three days to allow ample time to make a careful search."

"Just my idea," the sheriff responded.

"We can take a spare horse along with blankets and provisions, so that if we should happen to strike the trail we will be able to follow it up."

"Exactly! you have got the right idea," and the mayor rubbed his hands together, briskly, denoting his great satisfaction.

"There is one other thing," the sheriff observed; "I shall need a first-class Indian tracker, who can lift even a blind trail and follow it."

"There are several men around town who claim to be experts at that sort of thing, but the last time I gave them a trial they made a poor list of it."

"Why, the very man to do such work right up to the handle is in town!" the mayor claimed—"Old Hickory Bill Jackson, the mountain-man who killed Curly Master-ton!"

"That is so, by jinks!" the sheriff cried.

"He is the very man for us—an old scout and Injun-fighter. Why, I have heard men who know declare that, after Kit Carson, he was one of the best men that ever followed that line of business."

"I will send for him at once and see if he will go. I don't doubt that he will, for an old stager of his kind is always ripe for an adventure."

"Do so, and I will start Hagerman in to get the boys together."

By the time the sheriff returned Hickory Bill Jackson made his appearance, and the mayor at once proceeded to explain what was wanted.

"I reckon I can go all right, but I will have to ask the gentleman with whom I am traveling, Mr. Vandermiller," the scout replied.

"Wouldn't he like to make one of the posse?" the sheriff inquired. "If we strike

the scoundrels there will be a chance for some fun," and Peters smiled grimly as he made the remark.

"I shouldn't be at all surprised," the mountain veteran responded, "for I have always found him ripe for everything that was going. I'll see him and let you know inside of ten minutes."

Old Hickory was as good as his word; he soon returned with the information that Mr. Vandermiller would be delighted to join the party.

"Then we will start in about fifteen minutes," the sheriff announced. "You will need your rifle and get the best horses in the corral, for in this game a deal depends upon the horse-flesh."

"I reckon I am up in all the points of this game," Hickory Bill responded. "It isn't the first time, by a jugful, that I have led a party of this kind!"

Then the old mountain man hurried away.

As it happened Colonel Boone had a couple of Kentucky saddle horses in the corral which had been sent from Kentucky for his own use, and when Hickory Bill told him that he wanted to secure a pair of extra good animals the colonel let him have the pair.

"And two better horses you will not scare up in this section, either!" the host declared.

After but little delay the party got off—Dave Hagerman, the deputy-sheriff acting as guide, and, as he had been in the "hold up," a better guide could not be found.

The party rode at a good pace until they reached the scene of the robbery.

Old Hickory had the party halt under the tree where the outlaws had corralled them; then, dismounting, he began an examination of the ground.

As the soil was soft the task of the old scout was not a difficult one, although, in reality, it appeared little short of miraculous to the rest.

He proceeded in circles widening as he went on, and soon struck the trail made by the outlaws when they had led away the horses, and then it did not take him long to find where the horses had been kept.

After this discovery he made a big circuit, widening the circle as he proceeded, and at last came to the spot where the outlaws had struck off into the foot-hills.

"I reckon I have hit it off!" the old man exclaimed with a good deal of satisfaction, and at once returned to the party to make the result of his discoveries to a delighted delegation of man-hunters.

"I have hit off the trail, pards, but lifting a trail and being able to follow it are two entirely different things," the old mountain-man observed, "but we can try our luck, so here goes!"

Then he mounted and conducted the party to where the trail went up into the foot-hills.

There he dismounted, and giving his horse in charge of Vandermiller went on foot ahead of the party.

Old Hickory stuck to his task like a leech, riding at times, and at sundown had led the hunters into the defile which cut through the Santa Cruz mountain range.

The existence of this passage was a surprise to all of the party, for none of them had ever heard of it before.

"The darkness is beginning to gather, so we will have to go into camp until morning," the old trapper announced.

Whereupon all made themselves as comfortable as possible for the night.

The sheriff chafed over the delay for he understood that every moment's respite added to the chance of the outlaws escaping.

"Oh, be reasonable, sheriff!" Hickory Bill Jackson exclaimed, as Jim Peters was wishing for a few more hours of daylight, "neither horses nor men can go on, and we have got to stop."

"But, really, sheriff, you stand no chance to overtake these fellows with their great start, unless they loiter on the way, and a hundred to one they will not do that; yet, there is a possibility that they may have a hiding-place up in the mountains somewhere. If so, it is their game to go there and keep quiet until the row blows over."

The face of the sheriff lighted up.

"By Jove! I hope to heaven they have a roost of that kind, for then we would stand a good chance to get at them."

"Sart'in! but, sheriff, if I was a betting on

the thing, I would bet the odds that these fellows, with ten thousand dollars in their possession, don't intend to stay their time in no mountain cave," the old trapper replied, shrewdly.

This affair was like a picnic to the men, and so they got through the night all right. Early in the morning they followed the trail again, and at noon came into the little valley where the log cabin stood.

"Hayer's the spot but your men have flown the track!" Hickory Bill Jackson announced.

It only required a short examination to show that the outlaws had spent the night there.

"It is jest as I told you in the beginning," old Hickory remarked; "these fellows are not going to tarry anywhere and wait for the bloodhounds to come up."

"Let us push on and see if we can't track them down!" the sheriff urged.

"All right; but, sheriff, it is my notion the game is 'up.' This trail leads down to the main road, and when we get there I will be willing to bet a fortune that the party splits up and each man goes off on his own hook. In that case it will not be possible to track them."

"Then, too, they are on a regular traveled road, and twenty people have probably gone up and down since they passed, so their trail will be blotted out."

The sheriff shook his head.

He did not like the outlook, for it now appeared as though the expedition would accomplish nothing. The old guide spoke with the voice of a prophet, for everything turned out exactly as he had predicted.

"The rascals have done the trick and got safely off without leaving a clue as to where they have gone," was Old Hickory's conclusion.

"I reckon I know where they have gone," the sheriff supplemented, whereat all the party surveyed the sheriff with questioning glances.

"Yes, sir, I am giving it to you as straight as a string when I say that I believe I know where every man-Jack of these rascals are this minute."

"Where? Where?" was the general cry.

"Right in Red Water City!" Jim Peters declared.

The others stared incredulously, and shook their heads.

"I would be willing to bet a big amount of money on it!" the sheriff persisted.

Peters was an obstinate sort of a fellow, and once an idea got into his head he was reluctant to let it go.

"They are using Red Water City as a headquarters. They planned the game, came out and put her through, and then dashed back to the town again."

Much discussion over the sheriff's idea was had as the party rode to the north, on their homeward way.

It was necessary for them to ride clear to the north of the Santa Cruz range and then come down on the other side in order to reach Red Water City, therefore they were obliged to go into camp again and did not reach the town until about ten o'clock on the following day.

The city's denizens were very much disappointed, for they felt sure the expedition would be successful.

"Never mind! Better luck next time!" the mayor consoled.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE PINKERTONS.

ON the second day after the expedition's return, a couple of gentlemen made their appearance at the Rising Sun Hotel and registered as James and Walter Jones.

They were speculators, they explained to Colonel Boone, and had come over to Red Water City to see if there were any chances for good deals, as they understood the town was enjoying a boom.

"Oh, yes, everything is lively," the colonel assumed. "And a man using judgment could hardly put his money into anything without standing a chance to make a good stake."

The Jones brothers selected one of the best rooms in the house, a large apartment on the second floor, and retired to it at once

under the plea of having some letters to write.

Jerry Green, the peddler, was loafing around the bar-room when these strangers arrived, and after they had retired to their room, he watched his opportunity, when sure that no one saw him, to enter their apartment.

He did not take the trouble to knock, but entered in the most unceremonious manner, and once in he deliberately turned the key in the lock.

The Joneses sat by a round table in the center of the room, and, although they looked up to see who it was when the peddler entered, did not seem to be at all surprised by his behavior.

A few words will explain this mystery:

The resolute-faced, keen-eyed man who carried with him such an unmistakable air of being used to command, James Jones was, in reality, Robert Pinkerton, the head of the greatest detective bureau that the world has ever known.

When detectives were wanted Bob Pinkerton stood ready to find them, from a single man to an army of three or four hundred, at the shortest notice.

His companion was the superintendent of the bureau, who had charge of all the working details.

He was called Richard Ingersol, and men who were posted declared that, in the detective line, he had no superior in the country.

And, as to the peddler, Jerry Green, he was Edmund Gloster, whom the Pinkertons regarded as one of the best men on their force.

He had been detailed by the Pinkertons to hunt out the well-covered gang.

"What progress?" Pinkerton asked, after Gloster took a seat at the table.

"I have got along very well," the detective replied, and at once gave a description of how he had encountered Yellow Tommy, and through him got into the gang.

"You have done remarkably well," Pinkerton confessed, "and the three months you put in at the prison in Fort Scott aided you remarkably, that is evident."

A few words will explain this statement.

The Pinkertons had captured a cohort of rogues, but the proof was not so strong as was desirable; certain things were missing.

Then Gloster suggested that he be regularly committed to the prison under an assumed name, charged with being the captain of one of the worst rogue clans which ever existed.

This was done, and Gloster became a convict.

Prisoners confined in prisons are not supposed to hold much communication with each other, but they do, and it did not take long for the report to get around that "Jimmy Legs," Gloster's assumed name, was a chief among crooks.

By a little clever work his discharge was secured at the proper time, so that everything appeared to be all right.

Had it not been for this circumstance it is certain he could not have secured the confidence of Yellow Tommy.

"There are eight in this Red Water band?" Pinkerton asked, getting his memorandum-book ready.

"Yes, eight—or seven besides myself."

"Now then, this Englishman, Yellow Tommy, is one of the men, of course, but have you any suspicions in regard to the identity of the others?"

"Yes, [the blacksmith,] Martin Butterrick is one; but, although I have a suspicion in regard to a couple more, yet I am not certain enough about the matter to go ahead."

"How about the leader?"

"There I must admit I am completely puzzled," the spy replied. "I am certain that he is some man who lives right here in Red Water City, or in the neighborhood, but when I come to run over the men of the town with whom I have come in contact, I can't put my finger on a person who seems to fill the bill."

"Well, how, now, shall we proceed?" Robert Pinkerton remarked, reflectively.

"We have a line on the blacksmith and on Yellow Tommy, but would it be wise for us to nail them without the rest of the gang?"

"Decidedly not!" Ingersol dissented.

"If you made a move of that kind the odds

are big that the rest would take flight and we wouldn't get them."

"Just my idea," the spy coincided. "Besides in order to make a case against the men I should have to appear, and that would be good-by to my future usefulness, in this affair."

"You are right; it would be unwise for us to make a move at present," Robert Pinkerton admitted.

"We will lay low for a while. You have succeeded in getting yourself initiated into the gang, and there is no telling at what moment you may make an important discovery."

"Oh, I shall keep on the alert, of course, and in some unguarded moment the captain may give me a clue to his identity."

"He must be a deuced smart fellow," Ingersol inferred.

"Yes, and it is not going to be an easy job to trap him," the spy asserted.

"Let me see," cogitated the great detective, "I wonder how it would do to put up a job on this chief?"

"In what way?" Ingersol asked.

"Why contrive a scheme so that it will look as if he had a fine chance to collar a big sum of money without much trouble."

"An old idea but one that usually works successfully if the scheme is carefully planned," Ingersol assumed.

"I don't see why the game couldn't be worked," the spy added. "His last great success will make him sanguine that he can carry through any game which he undertakes."

"The bait must be a big one so as to be certain to attract him," Robert Pinkerton suggested.

"Oh, yes, no small sum will do. I would suggest putting the ante up to fifteen or twenty thousand dollars," the spy advised.

"Yes, twenty thousand is the figure!" Pinkerton decided promptly. "The chance to get such an enormous sum with an equally good chance to get off all right, will be a powerful temptation," the great detective inferred, "only we must so cover the trap that the most careful inspection will not reveal that there is anything wrong."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE RANCHER'S SUIT.

THE clock pointed to the hour of nine and the Keno Palace was well filled with people as usual.

Hardly a quarter of them took part in the game, though, for it was one of the favorite loafing places of a lot of people.

Katherine Montrose took her place at the piano and played in her brilliant way for fifteen minutes.

This was a great attraction and always drew a crowd.

Then she returned to her cigar store.

The rancher, Claverhouse, had been standing in the background, and now, when the crowd dispersed, he came forward and accosted the woman.

"How do you feel this evening, Miss Montrose?" he asked.

"Oh, is it you, Mr. Claverhouse?" she exclaimed. "You are quite a stranger."

"Yes, I have not been in town for a week."

The woman pulled out the stool.

"Sit down, and we can have a nice long chat," she volunteered.

"Just what I want," he avowed, as he took the proffered seat.

"How are affairs progressing on your ranch? Are you going to have a good year?"

"Well, yes, I think I will have a fair year, but cattle are so low that there will not be much money in ranching until the prices improve."

"If you can hold your own and make a little money I don't suppose you ought to complain."

"No, I suppose not, but I am not particularly well satisfied with this ranching, and I am thinking seriously of selling my place, for I believe I can make more money in something else."

"What do you calculate to go into?"

"Mining," Claverhouse answered. "If I can get hold of a good mining property I am sure I could make more money."

"Yes, I should imagine from what I have heard the men say, that mining, in this region, pays better than ranching."

"There is a deal of uncertainty about the business, and as I can get a fair price for the property, I have decided to sell out. My superintendent is anxious to buy. He has formed a syndicate and so has been able to raise the money."

"That is good."

"I will take the cash and invest it in a mine, but not in this immediate neighborhood, though," the Englishman explained, "for I am not particularly in love with Red Water City, nor the district surrounding it."

"I don't doubt that there are more attractive places."

"There certainly are. Now I want to have a little talk with you. Have you made up your mind yet as to whether you will join your fortunes with mine or not?"

Katherine Montrose laughed and shook her head.

"No, not yet."

"Isn't there any chance for me?"

"I think not," the woman replied, in a decided way. "It is just as I have told you from the beginning: I like my liberty too well to surrender it."

"I shall always be glad to count you in the list of my friends, but that is all."

"I am very much disappointed," the rancher candidly answered. "I was in hopes that I would be able to persuade you to go with me, for I feel sure I could make your life a happy one."

"I am satisfied that a life of single blessedness will suit me best," the woman repeated.

The rancher rose slowly to his feet.

"Is there any other man whom you prefer to me?" he asked.

"No, not a soul in the world!" the woman answered, decidedly; "but it is as I tell you: I don't want to marry anybody."

At this point a lot of cowboys came up to the stand for cigars, and interrupted the interview.

Claverhouse sauntered slowly away, a deeply disappointed man.

"I have not as much influence over the woman as I thought I possessed," he murmured.

"I had an idea that when it came to the last minute, and she found that I was going to leave this section, she would go with me."

"I was away off, though, and I suppose I might as well give up all thoughts of her."

Claverhouse had walked toward the door and was now at the end of the counter, but was halted by a couple of friends who wanted to talk about the price of cows with him.

While he was conversing with them a stranger made his appearance in the saloon. He was of such a peculiar appearance, and dressed in such an odd manner, that he attracted immediate attention.

The man was a trifle over the medium height and about forty-five or fifty years old. He had iron-gray hair, which he wore in long ringlets pushed back of his ears; a smooth face without a sign of a beard.

He wore a coat and pantaloons of black velvet, no vest, but an elaborately ruffled shirt, with a flowing collar and a loose, black silk necktie.

It only required one glance for the experienced western man to recognize, in the new-comer, one of the first-class gamblers who carry themselves with so high a head when a town is on a boom.

The stranger sauntered into the center of the saloon, and there halted and cast an inquiring glance around.

All eyes in the room were fixed on him.

"Good-evening, gentlemen! I hope you all find yourselves in a good state of health?" he said, with extreme politeness.

"I am after a little information which I will be much obliged if any one can furnish."

"We will do it if we can of course," Dave Fox, the proprietor, assured. "What is it you want to know?"

"I am in search of a gentleman called Claverhouse, the owner of the Lone Pine Ranch," he explained.

The simultaneous movement of the eyes of the bystanders to the Englishman, was so marked that the stranger was informed, then and there.

The Englishman stepped forward.

"Claverhouse is my name," he said.

For a full minute the stranger surveyed the rancher with the closest attention, then he said:

"As we are unacquainted with each other I must introduce myself."

"My name is John Buckingham, but I am more commonly known as Arizona John, a name which I have borne for the last thirty years."

"I am one of the old stagers, you see, and I reckon there are few old hands in this Territory who are not posted in regard to me."

The man said this with a self-complacent air, as though he considered that he amounted to a great deal.

There were a dozen or so of men in the saloon, who nodded their heads when the stranger announced his identity.

Arizona John had vibrated between Prescott, Tucson and Santa Fe for years, and bore the reputation of being one of the nerviest gamblers who ever flipped a card.

"Your name is Claverhouse, and my name is Buckingham, and now the introduction is completed," the gambler said in a peculiar, pompous way.

The rancher nodded assent.

"And I have come all the way from Prescott to have a talk with you. I don't suppose you ever heard of me before?" he asked abruptly.

"Never!"

"Well, I am a peculiar sort of man," the gambler averred; "I have always prided myself upon being as square as a die, and I never had a pard yet in my life that I didn't stick to until the end came."

"Now then, I got word over in Prescott that my old pard, Curly Masterton, had some trouble with you, and all arrangements were made to settle the thing according to rule, but, some way, he got switched off on another track and was killed."

The bystanders listened with the utmost interest to this explanation.

"Yes, that is correct," Claverhouse replied.

"Well, now, I have to announce that I have come over on purpose to take up the quarrel," the gambler informed the crowd. "It doesn't matter to me what it was about. It is enough that he was going to lock horns with you, and I stand ready to take his place."

"Well, really, this is a rather strange thing," Claverhouse protested. "Masterton and I were going to meet, but, as he was unlucky enough to get wiped out before we had completed our arrangements, the thing didn't come off."

"It seems to me that, if Masterton was your pard, and you are anxious to square up the account of his death, you ought to tackle the man who killed him."

"Oh, I intend to!" the gambler replied immediately, "but I thought I would proceed in regular order, and as far as I could learn you, really, was the man who ought to have met him first; therefore I propose to go ahead in that way."

Claverhouse pondered over the matter for a moment. He saw that the gambler was determined and under the circumstances he did not see any way to get out of the quarrel.

"All right, I am your man!" the Englishman promptly assented. "Is it your wish to settle the thing now?"

"Oh, no!" the old gambler exclaimed. "When I engage in an affair of this sort I always propose to have everything conducted decently and in order," he explained.

"My second will wait upon you in the morning, if you will have the kindness to tell me where you can be found, and then everything can be arranged in ship-shape style."

Claverhouse reflected for a moment.

"You will find me at the Rising Sun Hotel."

"All right! My representative will call upon you. You see, Mr. Claverhouse, I am one of the old school, and believe in proceeding in a certain routine way."

"It does not make any difference to me," the Englishman answered, carelessly. "If you really want a hostile meeting I will give it to you, and it matters little to me how we arrange so long as we both get a fair show."

"Certainly! certainly! Of course! A square deal for each of us," the veteran card-sport declared, in his odd old-fashioned way.

"Well, that is all," he added. "Good-evening!" and Arizona John Buckingham departed, leaving a deal of amazement behind him.

"I wonder how many more of these gamblers I have got to fight?" the rancher asked.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ARRANGING THE FIGHT.

Few episodes had created as much talk in Red Water City as the appearance of the Prescott gambler, Arizona John Buckingham.

The peculiarities of the man, and the idea that he had come clear to Red Water City for the express purpose of taking up the quarrel of his dead friend made the average citizen wonder.

Of course, it did not take long for the account of the affair to circulate throughout the town, and by nine o'clock, next morning, almost everybody knew the particulars of the affair.

Vandermill and Hickory Bill had got through their breakfast and sat down to smoke a cigar in the corner of the saloon when Colonel Boone came hurrying in, with the news.

The colonel had just finished a long conversation with Claverhouse about the matter.

He now took a seat by the pair and soon they were in possession of the intelligence.

"Well, it seems as if you were going to have some occupation on your hands," the New Yorker remarked. "You killed Masterton and now you will have to meet this man and give him satisfaction."

"Yes, that is the way he has figured it out," Colonel Boone observed. "But, he has come to the conclusion to tackle the rancher, first."

"That is reserving me for the last as a choice bit," the old scout suggested with a grin.

"I don't suppose that Claverhouse admires this sort of thing," Vandermill inferred.

"No, he does not!" the colonel answered. "He told me this morning that he considered the whole affair an infernal nuisance, but, under the circumstances he did not see any way out of it. Out in this country, you know, the average man fights."

"I am tolerably well acquainted with this Arizona John Buckingham, and know that he is a most peculiar man," Hickory Bill observed. "He is an old-time gambler from the lower Mississippi, and full of strange notions."

"The man is no wolf, after the style of Curly Masterton, and I don't believe he ever provoked a quarrel in his life, but when he got into a difficulty he always held his own in the good old Southern style. Being just what he is kinder puts me in a hole!" the old scout declared.

"How so?" the New Yorker asked.

"Curly Masterton was a wolf, and I killed him because I believe wolves ought to be killed; but this man doesn't come under that same head at all," Hickory averred. "If he insists, of course I must fight him, but I will be darned if I either want to kill the man or give him a chance to kill me."

"There is one escape for you, Hickory," Vandermill suggested after the host had departed. "He has got to meet the Englishman, Claverhouse, first, and the result of that encounter may fix it so that he will not be in any condition to do any more fighting just at present."

"That is true, and I can jest tell you, boss, I would a deal rather somebody else damaged the man than myself."

The conversation was interrupted at this point by the entrance of one of the principal gamblers of the town.

He was called David Rochester, and bore a good reputation as being a quiet, well-behaved fellow.

Passing through the saloon, Rochester spoke to Colonel Boone, then was escorted up-stairs by him.

"The chances are big that he is bearing the hostile message," Vandermill observed to Hickory Bill.

Which supposition was correct.

Colonel Boone conducted the gambler to where Claverhouse waited for his appearance, and, as the colonel was an old hand at this sort of business, he remained to aid the negotiations.

Rochester was a blunt sort of a fellow, and at once came to the point.

"I have come to arrange this duel between you and Arizona John," he explained.

"But, the man isn't going at it our way, out here. He wants me to talk you into using a pair of dueling pistols which he has, saying they are the only tools which gentlemen ought to fight with," Rochester explained.

"Dueling pistols? Bah! I will have nothing of the sort!" Claverhouse declared, firmly. "Revolvers are good enough! I fought his pard with revolvers and he will have to be content with them."

"He will have to be, of course, if you will not agree to anything else," the gambler's second acquiesced. "And, as to time, what do you say to this afternoon, about five o'clock, and the open plains just above the town?"

"That will suit."

"Everything is all settled, then. I suppose, Colonel, we can get you to act as master of ceremonies?" Rochester said to the colonel.

"Oh, yes, I am always ready to oblige the boys," Colonel Boone replied. "I will attend to the doctor, and to having everything in tip-top style!"

Rochester, thanking the host, departed.

"By the way, did you know that Arizona John is staying in the house?" the colonel asked.

"No; I was not aware of the fact."

"Yes, he took up his quarters hyer last night, but has kept himself strictly to his room."

At this point the landlord was disturbed by a summons, and was forced to depart. This summons was from Arizona John.

Colonel Boone found the veteran enjoying a cigar.

"Sit down a moment. I want to talk to you, landlord," he said.

The host complied.

"I have been thinking that there is a good deal of red tape in the world, and that sometimes it would be possible to cut the thing so as to save trouble."

"Oh, yes, undoubtedly."

"Now then, that I have arranged my first encounter all right, why would it not be possible to arrange the second to come off after the first?"

The colonel looked astonished.

"Well, that would be a rather novel idea and no mistake!" the landlord averred.

"I do not see any reason why the matter cannot be arranged in that way."

"Well, I suppose it could be fixed if you could get your opponent to agree," he finally answered.

"I do not see what possible difference it can make to him."

"No, that is true, and you will find Hickory an easy sort of a fellow to get along with and very accommodating."

"Then the best and easiest way of settling the matter would be for the man to come and see me so we can talk the matter over."

Colonel Boone stared.

"Well, darn me if this ain't one of the queerest notions I ever heard!" he declared.

"Maybe it is odd, but, it is the best way to settle things. Do you know where the man can be found?"

"Sart'in! Right hyer in this house!"

"Oh, is that possible?"

"You bet! He has been staying with me for a month now. I will have him up here in a brace of shakes!"

Colonel Boone departed, shaking his head over the vagaries of the old river sport.

Hickory Bill was in the hotel office, in company with the New Yorker, and the landlord soon revealed to him the communication, at which both men were astonished.

"Don't this really beat your time!" the landlord asked.

"Yes, it is one of the oddest things I ever heard, and yet there is a good deal of sound sense about the matter," Vandermill said.

"All right landlord; we go right up," decided Hickory, promptly.

"I knowed you would," said the colonel,

and he at once conducted the pair to the apartment of the gambler and introduced them to the occupant.

The veteran surveyed the old mountain-man with a deal of curiosity.

"It strikes me that in the old time I have heard of you in connection with the Indian business," Arizona John remarked.

"Yes, at one time I did considerable hustling around," Hickory Bill replied.

"How was it that you came to kill Curly Masterton? An old time quarrel?"

"Yes, I had a grudge against the man for years, and you know, Buckingham, that Masterton was one who got into trouble wherever he went."

"Yes, Curly was inclined to be quarrelsome and overbearing, but, as it was his nature, I suppose he couldn't help it," the veteran gambler admitted.

"Well, Curly was my pard, he is dead, and I am obliged to look for satisfaction to the man who is responsible for his death."

"I am the man, and quite ready to step up to the captain's office and settle whenever you say so."

"And I will state that, in my opinion, my rifle never did a better job than on the day it planted Curly Masterton."

"Of course it is natural for you to think that way, but, it isn't of any use for us to discuss the subject. Let us come to the business on hand."

"This afternoon, at five o'clock, I meet Mr. Claverhouse in a duel in the open space about the town, and I thought that, if you didn't mind, there might be a chance for us to settle this thing at the same time."

"It is all right, as far as I am concerned," Hickory Bill assured. "I will be there ready for the fight, but I am a little puzzled as to whether you will be on the ground or not. Claverhouse may lay you out, you know."

"I don't think that is at all likely," the old sport returned, with an air of perfect indifference.

"I reckon that neither of us will get materially harmed. I am not particularly anxious to inflict any severe damage upon him. That duel is not for blood, as ours will be, you know."

A peculiar look came into the eyes of the old Indian-fighter.

"Well, if you want blood I will try to give you all you want of it!" he exclaimed, significantly.

"The time and place will suit all right, and the weapons will be rifles."

"Ah, yes, but I don't like that!" the old sport protested; "I would prefer not to fight with rifles."

"Rifles are my weapons!" Hickory Bill declared, decidedly. "We either fight with rifles or we don't fight at all!"

Under the circumstances the old gambler was compelled to yield.

So it was arranged that the Arizona John Hickory Bill fight should take place directly after the first encounter.

Of course when the news of this arrangement spread abroad great was the wonder, and about everybody in and around the town made arrangements to attend the fight.

"This fellow is about as pig-headed as the other, though in a different way," the New Yorker remarked.

"Yes, he rushes to his fate, for I shall have to wipe him out!" was the scout's decision.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A NOVEL ENCOUNTER.

When the hour of five approached it seemed as if about all the citizens of Red Water City had gathered on the plain about the town, the place fixed for the encounter, and promptly at five o'clock the contending parties made their appearance.

Arizona John, David Rochester and a gambler friend who had volunteered to assist him, first appeared on the ground; a couple of minutes after, Colonel Boone, with the doctor and a half a dozen friends were on hand.

Hickory Bill Jackson, with the New Yorker, Vandermill, were the last to arrive.

Then the colonel went to work immediate-

ly, in a business-like manner to arrange the preliminaries.

The duelists were to stand a hundred feet apart and fire at the drop of a hat; but there was to be no advancing after the first shot, for the veteran river sport protested against this method of fight and the raucher did not insist.

"It is foreign to all the principles of the pistol duel!" Arizona John declared. "Dueling is for the settlement of disputes among gentlemen, not a chance for a couple of men to go out and murder each other, with no opportunity of either one escaping."

"I am satisfied," Claverhouse replied.

He was not anxious to kill the old avenger, really believing he was affected in his mind.

All the preliminaries were arranged at last, and the duelists faced each other.

The crowd held their breath.

"Ready?" questioned Colonel Boone.

Both men responded "ready!"

Down dropped the hat.

Claverhouse fired almost immediately, but the old gambler dwelt on his aim for a moment; then his shot broke on the stillness of the air.

Claverhouse gave a slight start, and every spectator jumped to the conclusion that he was wounded.

Colonel Boone and the doctor hastened to him.

"I think he has hit me in the right arm, but I reckon it does not amount to anything."

This proved to be the case—a slight flesh wound only.

When this was reported to Arizona John he remarked:

"We are quits, then, for he has barked me in the shoulder. If he is satisfied I am, and we will call the thing off."

Claverhouse was surprised at this, but, as he had not sought the quarrel, he was prepared to withdraw from it in any honorable way.

"Now, I reckon, is my time to put in an appearance, Hickory Bill remarked as he shifted his rifle to the hollow of his arm.

"I tell you what it is, boss, this man won't stand any show with me, for he is a slow firer, a man who dwells on his aim, and I shall kill him before he has a chance to pull trigger."

"I say, Bill, it seems a shame to wipe out the old chap."

"Yes, but it has to be; he himself has forced it; it is his life or mine, and it'll not be mine; you can bet your life on that!"

The first duel ended, Colonel Boone set to work to arrange for the second.

The distance was paced off and the combatants placed in position.

The observing men of the crowd fancied that the old river sport looked serious as he surveyed his opponent, as if he realized that he had a difficult task on his hands.

But whether he did or did not, the crowd were with the old scout almost to a man.

In fact, the opinion was so strong that it was almost impossible to get a bet on the result.

At last all was ready.

The colonel fired the pistol-shot.

Hickory Bill discharged his rifle so quickly that it seemed like an echo.

Down went Arizona John, shot through the heart!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A MODERN AMAZON.

MIKE McKENNA, an undersized, good-natured, Irishman was the proprietor of the Flush Hotel, one of the numerous saloons of Red Water City.

There was nothing to the hotel but the name, for it was a saloon, pure and simple.

The Flush Hotel, with a large lot of property in the neighborhood, was owned by a Miss Diana Davenport, who had never yet favored Red Water City with a visit.

Mike McKenna was sunning himself at the front door of his saloon. It was two o'clock in the afternoon and there was no trade going.

Billy Jones, the Express agent, at that moment came down the street from the post-office. In his hand he held an open letter which he waved in the air as he approached McKenna.

"Hey! old man, I've got some news for you!"

"Divil a wan of me cares, for it's mighty little news that comes to me, that is good for anything."

"Oh, this is all right. I have got a letter here from Miss Diana Davenport, the boss of your shanty, and this surrounding property, in which she sends word that she will be here in a special hack, this afternoon."

"Well, well, I sha'n't be sorry to see the lady, for I want to be after talking to her about some repairs."

"It's a foine man ye are, Billy Jones, and it's a foine Express agent ye make, but a worse real estate agent to look after a bit of property, like the Flush Hotel here, couldn't be found if ye were to scour the country for a hundred miles."

"Oh, that's all right, old man; they send me word to collect all the money I can, and spend as little as possible and I have to do it."

"Yis, yis, I suppose ye're right, old man; ye can't do anything but what ye'r ordered."

"Now then, Mickey, as you are a pretty good fellow, I'm going to give you a pointer which may do you some good."

"This Miss Diana Davenport is a peculiar sort of a woman. She's about thirty years old, and prides herself upon being able to take care of herself. She can handle a rifle or revolver, and is rather inclined to be a little loud in her actions."

"Now then, she's coming in a special hack right to the hotel here, and from her letter I get the idea that she thinks you are running a first-class hotel."

"Oh, musha! what will she say when she lays her two eyes on the likes of this shebang?" Mike exclaimed, with a comical glance at the rather dilapidated Flush hostelry.

"Yes, I think she'll be apt to be disappointed; and now, this is the game that you must play:

"You must get together a half-a-dozen of your friends and have them all ready for her arrival."

"Yis, yis, I kin do that aisy enough; shure I could git a dozen, if six wasn't enough."

"Six will do. Have them outside here, to meet the hack, and when the lady drives up and descends, you must all greet her with a cheer of welcome."

"Oh, yis; it's a fine game that is, and I am the boy that can work it to the queen's taste."

"It will be very apt to make you solid with her and then, perhaps, you can get her to make some improvements."

The Express agent went on his way and Mike McKenna proceeded to hunt up his friends.

It did not take him long to get the six together, and he soon had them thoroughly instructed, as to what they were to do.

At exactly half past three a hack drawn by a pair of powerful horses came rattling down the main street of Red Water City, and, with a flourish, drew up in front of the Flush Hotel.

The driver, a raw-boned country boy, with a face which always wore a grin, leaped off the box, hurried to the door of the hack, opened it, and assisted a lady to descend.

"Now then, ye onery galoots, git a proper respect on yerselves, for this is Miss Diana Davenport, the boss of these hyer shanties."

"It's proud I am to see ye, miss," and off came Mike McKenna's hat while he made a most elaborate bow, sweeping down near to the earth.

And his six friends at the same moment indulged in a series of yells that would have done credit to a lot of drunken red-skins.

Miss Diana Davenport was indeed a peculiar-looking woman. She was above the medium height, a woman of thirty-five or thereabouts, with a face about as hard as a pine knot. Her complexion showed that for years she had been used to an open air life, and she, in general appearance, was about as masculine as feminine.

She was robed in a walking dress composed of a coarse, black stuff, which she looped up at the side. At her waist she wore, belted, a revolver and a ten-inch bowie knife.

For a hat she had a man's black sombrero, pinned up at one side.

After her from the coach came an old

acquaintance, Hank Nicholson—Handsome Hank of the Three Star Ranch, the gentleman who, it will be remembered, made so bad a blunder in attempting to call the peddler with the Gila Monster fever remedy to an account.

Hank was one of the men who was never backward in coming forward, and on the present occasion he stepped from the hack with the air of a man who owned the whole entire town.

He had another cowboy with him—a rather oldish man, short and fat, and who was a well-known character in Red Water City, known as Old Man Buddington.

Both Hank and his companion were fully armed, having six-shooters belted to their sides, and carrying Winchester rifles in the hollow of their arms.

The lady, evidently, was pleased at her reception, for she smiled graciously at Mike McKenna, and said in a tone which she strove to render mild and pleasant—her voice was rather harsh:

"Is this Mister Mike McKenna?"

"Yis, ma'am, and it's glad I am to welcome ye to Red Water City."

"This is my first visit, and I must admit that I am somewhat surprised at the looks of my property, for I had an idea that the Flush Hotel was quite a mansion," and she shook her head with a disdainful air as she surveyed the saloon.

"No, ma'am, it's jest the same as ye see it now, and it always has been. I can tell ye, ma'am, that it's a proud man I'd be if I had a good hotel on this spot, and lashings of money I would make out of it, for there is no finer location in the town for doing business, d'ye moind?"

"Oh, well, that is a matter which can be easily arranged. I am here for the purpose of looking after my property, and seeing what is the best arrangement I can make in regard to it."

"I feelsure, ma'am, that if ye makes up yer mind to invest a little money in improving this wee bit of property ye will never be after regretting it."

"Oh, I don't doubt that I shall see my way clear to fixing the place up."

"I have brought money with me which I intend to use in improving the property which I already possess, and in purchasing more."

The bystanders pricked up their ears at this announcement.

"You will be after finding plenty of opportunities to lay the money out to advantage, I am sure ma'am."

"I'm a little disappointed about one thing: having an idea that the Flush was a regular hotel, I expected to make my headquarters here, while I remained in Red Water City."

"Indade, ma'am, it is dreadful sorry I am but, it can't be fixed."

"There's a foine hotel up the street—Colonel Boone's Rising Sun Hotel. The colonel will take you in and make ye as comfortable as the day is long."

"I can certify to that," Handsome Hank exclaimed; "the colonel is one of the whitest men that ever walked on top of this here footstool."

"That will do; I will go there; I'll see you again Mr. McKenna."

"Yis, ma'am," and again the Irishman bowed to the ground.

Miss Davenport re-entered the coach accompanied by her satellites, and was driven to the Rising Sun Hotel, where Colonel Boone, who had been prepared by a friendly runner, who had hurried on to tell him of the peculiar guest who was coming, received her with all the honors.

The best set of apartments in the hotel was given up for the accommodation of Miss Diana Davenport and her attendants.

The lady said she was tired, and would lie down and rest until supper.

Handsome Hank, and his companion, the fat cowboy, "spread themselves" so loudly in the saloon as to make everybody in the house aware that a great personage had taken up her quarters beneath the roof of the Rising Sun.

Both cowboys had plenty of money and spent it at the bar with a liberal hand.

"I tell yer what it is, boys, this here is one of the biggest snaps that I ever struck since I was hatched."

"The work is as easy as rolling off a log. All we have to do, is to look after the lady and the pay is big."

CHAPTER XXXV.

SCENTING GAME.

As the coach deposited the strange lady in front of the Plush Hotel, English Tommy, and Martin, the blacksmith, happened to pass that way.

They halted, of course, attracted by the sight, and listened attentively to the conversation, and when Miss Davenport drove to the Rising Sun Hotel, the pair exchanged glances.

"Say, what do you think of this sort of thing?" exclaimed the blacksmith. "Is this woman talking through her hat? or is she really promenading through this 'ere country, with thousands of dollars in her wallet?"

"Oh, I reckon the thing is all right. I don't doubt but what she has got the money. I have heard of her before—always heard that she was a woman having a great deal of cash."

"Yes, but I say, 'tain't possible that she is foolish enough to carry around a big sum of cash with her?"

"Why not? Hasn't she got two big cowboys as a body-guard?"

"I say, Tommy, if this woman is carrying around any such amount of money the quicker the captain knows all about it the better."

"Right, there! If the captain chips in the chances are big that he will do a fine stroke of business."

The two proceeded to the hotel to reconnoiter. In the saloon they found the two cowboys.

Of course, it was easy to get on good terms with men disposed to be friends with everybody.

"It seems to me," observed Yellow Tommy, to Handsome Hank, "that you have got one of the softest snaps I ever saw."

"Yes, sir-ee! You can bet your sweet life on that! This here Miss Davenport, is a lady, every inch of her; and, what is more, she has got the 'rocks' to back her up."

"Almost any woman can put on style; but, when it comes to a woman with a hundred thousand dollars, you can bet all you are worth that the ducats which she spends like a queen are going to carry her through."

"Yes," Yellow Tommy admitted, "there ain't no doubt about that; but, I say, is this a sure enough thing that you are giving us?"

"Sart'ni! straight as a string! What is it that you can't git yer mind around?"

"Why, I heard talk outside that she was carrying around fifteen or twenty thousand dollars with her."

"That is a fact," Handsome Hank asserted; "that is the kind of woman she is!"

"Why, old man, when we rolled into Red Water City to-day, in that hack, we brought a good thirty thousand dollars with us in clean cash."

This announcement caused the other two to stare.

"Oh, it is a fact! I give you my word of honor as a gentleman," reassured Hank.

"Well, I'll be blamed if this don't beat my time!" Yellow Tommy protested. "I have heard of some queer things since I've sojourned in this vale of tears, but I never before heard of a woman lugging around thirty thousand dollars in cash in a hack."

"Oh, she is a queer article and no mistake!" Handsome Hank asseverated. "Anybody who got a good look at her could see that with half an eye."

"But, old man, there was a deal of good sound business in this thing, too. What would the Express Company have charged for bringing thirty thousand dollars this long trip?"

"Well, I don't doubt the Wells-Fargo Company would have made a pawnbroker's charge—they're made just that way," Yellow Tommy admitted.

"Well, she saved those ducats, and, it strikes me, it was a right smart business transaction."

"But, I say, what does a woman want to lug so much cash around with her for?"

"Because she has come up into this district to make investments, and she is one of the kind who believes in paying the ready cash, on the nail, for anything she buys."

"Now, for instance, on next Monday we are going out to Mud Creek to see a big ranch."

"This here property is a mighty fine place, they say. It is called the Cross Keys Ranch, and is owned by General Baldy Somerset."

"The general wants to sell, and is willing to take fifteen thousand dollars, cash on the nail, so we are going out there on Monday to give it to him."

Yellow Tommy had gained all the information desired, and, taking another drink with the genial cowboy, he departed with his companion, the blacksmith.

Once in the street, Martin asked his companion what he thought about the matter?

"Well, I think we stand about as good a chance to get fifteen thousand dollars as ever came in our way, and we shan't have to work or fight particularly hard for it either," was the answer.

"Just how it looks to me, old man," the blacksmith avowed, "and I think the quicker the captain is informed the better."

"I'll attend to that," Yellow Tommy declared. "I'll hunt him up right away, and you bet when our chief takes the scent the grass won't grow under his feet."

"I know that; the captain is a hustler when the game is flushed."

"By the way, what has become of that fellow you used to be so thick with—that Jerry Green, the peddler, with his durned old Gila Monster Fever Remedy?"

"He has gone to Tucson," Yellow Tommy replied; "and, Martin, he is one of us, you know."

"Well, I kinder had an idea that he was when I saw how much you and he were together, but I don't fancy the man. I took him to be a sneak the first time I set eyes on him."

"Oh, he is a first class crook," Yellow Tommy declared.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

AGAIN THE SIGNAL.

It is Sunday night, and the outlaws were prompt in obeying the summons which had been issued by the chief.

They were all in their places—the chief at the end of the room behind the table, the seven men arranged around the sides.

One, the peddler, was absent, he having gone to Tucson to put away his money.

"Well, boys, we are together once again, and it is somewhat of a surprise to me, for I did not anticipate that we could have a meeting inside of a couple of months."

"But, as some of you know, there is big game afoot, and as everything seems propitious, I have called you together to announce the order of exercises."

"I have been on the alert to get all the points in this Davenport lay-out, which is pretty sure to net us fifteen thousand dollars in cool yellow eagles."

"I have been out and made a careful examination of this Cross Keys Ranch on Mud Creek, and find that it is nicely situated for a stroke of business of our kind, for there is plenty of timber in the neighborhood, to afford concealment, and we can get within five hundred yards of the ranch without any trouble."

"That is all right, then," Yellow Tommy observed, gleefully; "you couldn't ask anything better if you had it made to order. But, how about the cowboys at the ranch? Is there enough of them to eat us up if we come to a fight?"

"No, that is one of the points about which I was anxious, and that is why I went myself to make a personal examination."

"The cowboys are all out on the range, and there are only three or four men, besides the general and his family, on the ranch, and these men are not young fellows who would be apt to make a fight, but veterans almost past useful service."

"Under these circumstances, then, it looks as if this might turn out to be the greatest picnic we have ever had," Yellow Tommy remarked.

All others present now joined in the conversation, and each and every one expressed satisfaction at the prospect.

"The meeting place will be the big woods at the junction of Mud Creek and the Santa Cruz River," the outlaw captain kindly announced. "The time will be daybreak. Try and be on the ground, boys, before the light gets strong enough for any one to see you."

All responded that they would be there in time.

"Arm yourselves with both Winchester rifles and revolvers, and see that you have a plentiful supply of cartridges, for we are going to work this game in a thickly settled section of the country, and we may have difficulty in getting away without a fight."

"That is all, so-long boys!"

Five minutes later the outlaws had vanished.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

AT CROSS KEYS RANCH.

DURING the time that elapsed between the arrival of Miss Diana Davenport, and the Monday when she was to make her pilgrimage to Cross Keys Ranch, her satellites, Handsome Hank and Old Man Buddington, made the town lively.

Both had plenty of money and spent it liberally while they chanted the praises of their mistress.

The citizens of Red Water City were used to all sorts of strange customers, and so did not wonder much at Miss Diana Davenport, although the majority of them thought she must be a little cracked or else she would never go lugging so large a sum of money around the country in a hack.

And when the fact was pointed out that she had two body-guards armed to the teeth, the greater part of the citizens turned up their noses.

"Bah!" exclaimed one old gray-beard who knew what he was talking about, "neither of those fellows has got any sand; they are all brag and blow! Just wait till a gang pops on 'em and if they don't try to hide under the seats of the coach, then I don't know the men; but you can bet your life I do."

It was one o'clock before the hack started.

Cross Keys Ranch was about two hours drive from Red Water City. Miss Davenport rode inside and the body-guards, Hank Nicholson and Old Man Buddington, were on the box with the driver, carrying their Winchester across their laps, making a great show of being ready for war.

They did not expect any, and guessed aright, for the trip was without event until they came in sight of Cross Keys Ranch.

The ranch was a low, scattered range of buildings, built of "dobles," the yellow, unburnt bricks of the Mexicans, which give so good service on the dry Western plains.

In front of the ranch stood General Baldy Somerset and his retainers, waiting the arrival of the hack.

The coach came on at a good pace, but, when it was within five hundred feet of the home building, a most surprising thing took place.

The vehicle was passing within one hundred feet of a clump of woods—a long belt of timber, which stretched away to the southward.

From the edge of this timber sprang a sheet of flame, coming as unexpectedly as the forked lightning starts from the clear sky when there is no sign of a storm.

Down pitched both horses, writhing in the agonies of death, and the three men on the box took a somersault over the foot-board, on top of the horses.

Then, forth from the timber dashed the eight outlaws, all in masks, and wearing false beards and wigs.

They charged down on the coach with leveled rifles.

Miss Davenport, pale and trembling, knelt in the center of the coach, apparently frightened half to death.

The outlaw leader halted at the window of the hack, with three of his followers, while the other four proceeded to disarm the driver and the two cowboy guards—all of whom had been so completely upset by their heavy fall as to have all idea of fight knocked out of them.

"Don't be frightened, miss!" exclaimed the outlaw leader in a gruff tone. "We'll do you no harm, if you don't cut up ugly."

but if you do, we wouldn't hold your life worth a nickel."

"Oh, don't harm me, sir, and I will do anything you say," Miss Davenport cried, in trembling accents."

"All right, then. What we want is the fifteen thousand dollars you have got with you in fifteen bags. Hand them out at once for we are in a hurry."

"Certainly, sir! Here the money all is!" and Miss Davenport quickly tossed out the fifteen bags, each one of which bore the bank's stamp of holding a thousand dollars in golden eagles.

By this time, the other outlaws, having secured the driver and the cowboys, rejoined their leader.

Each man took a couple of the bags, with the exception of the blacksmith, who only got one, much to his disgust.

"So-long!" cried the outlaw chief, in triumph.

The gang turned and rode at full speed for the timber, from which they had come.

Into the timber they disappeared just as though the earth had opened, and swallowed them.

For five minutes within the woodland they rode on at a rapid gallop; then, feeling tolerably safe from pursuit, they slackened up a little.

Never were men more happy!

Never had fifteen thousand dollars been won more easily!

"Well, boys, I tell you what it is," the outlaw captain exclaimed, "we certainly do have the devil's own luck; everything seems to come our way."

"But, now that we have got the cash, we must separate, and get to our homes without being recognized."

"This piece of woods is about five miles long by three wide, and my idea is to go to the center of it, and there separate."

"There will be pursuit of course, as soon as people can get ready, but, that will take a couple of hours at the least, and by that time we will be well out of the timber, so that, if they hunt for us here they will only have their labor for their pains."

On, then, they rode, a jolly lot of fellows through the tall timber.

When they arrived at what the outlaw chief considered the center of the woodland, they halted, shook hands all around, and separated, going off in couples, for their better security.

The outlaw chief and Yellow Tommy formed one couple.

Both had removed their disguises which they had stuffed into their saddle-pouch.

The pair came out of the wood on the open prairie.

The road ran about a mile distant, along a scattered growth of dwarfed oaks and pines, and for this road the two horsemen headed, chatting cheerfully, in blissful unconsciousness that any danger threatened them.

But, there was danger!

The sky was clear, but there was thunder and lightning ready to break!

When the two came within a quarter of a mile of this road, forth from the oaks and undergrowth rode armed horsemen!

The line of this oak scrub really was picketed for five miles, so as to cover the whole extent of the timber!

What did it mean?

Had the citizen scoundrels been, at last, caught in a net of their own weaving?

"What in heaven's name does this mean?" exclaimed the now unmasked chief in dismay.

"So help me Bob! I don't know, governor!" Yellow Tommy replied. "But, I say, captain, I have a mortal guess that we have fallen right into a snap-shot trap."

"It looks like it!" the captain acknowledged—his face now convulsed with mingled fear and rage.

"And we are not able to do anything, either—not able to help ourselves out of this miserable hole! We cannot fight, for there are too many of them."

"No, no, captain, there isn't any use of trying any game of that kind. We could kill a few, but they would only wipe us out dead sure, and we're not ready for that kind of a funeral, if I know myself. We haven't done anything that amounts to a hanging matter yet, and you can bet high that I am

not going to throw the noose around my own neck, now."

"You are right. If we are caught, we will have to take our punishment like men and that's all there is to it."

The pair had halted upon making the unwelcome discovery, and four of the strange horsemen who had ridden directly toward them were now near enough to be recognized. Jim Peters, the sheriff, was in the advance, and three of the representative citizens of Red Water City were at his back.

They rode up, halted, and Jim Peters exclaimed: "This is a mighty bad bit of business for a man of your reputation to be engaged in, Mister Mortimer Claverhouse."

Is the reader astonished to learn that the exclusive and aristocratic young Englishman, the master of the Lone Pine Ranch, was the chief of this gang of outlaws?

It was the truth.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE GANG ROUND-UP.

BOTH Claverhouse and his companion affected to be greatly astonished.

They stared at the sheriff; they stared at the armed men.

"Really, Mr. Sheriff, I don't quite comprehend what you're driving at, and I will have to ask you for an explanation."

"That is right, Claverhouse; keep a stiff upper lip. A man seldom loses anything by putting on a bold front; but, it's no use, this time. We have got you foul and salt won't save you."

"You know very well what we want you for. We have caught you red-handed, and you'll have to excuse me if I snap these Yankee bracelets on your British wrists!" and the sheriff produced a pair of handcuffs.

The color flushed red into Claverhouse's face.

"Oh, come, sheriff, I say: is it necessary to go through this humiliating performance?"

"Yes, this is one of the official duties of my office. Whenever I make a prisoner of an outlaw, to snap the handcuffs on him is lesson number one; so hold out your hands!"

"What! am I a prisoner?" Claverhouse exclaimed, as though he were astonished at the bare suggestion of such a thing.

"You are just that!"

"Upon what charge?"

"Highway robbery, of course!"

"Oh, but such a charge is absolutely ridiculous!" Claverhouse declared with a fine show of indignation.

"Not much! You have played a bold game, Mr. Claverhouse, but games of this kind cannot go on forever. There must come a time when there will be a slip up."

"A bold game? I don't understand!" asserted the Englishman with astounding effrontery.

"Oh, don't you? Well, everybody else now understands it, as you'll learn to your sorrow before you're a day older. As I said, you've played it bold and sharp, and your band has been more successful than any that ever operated in this section of country; but, as that kind of performance had to be put a stop to, a nice little trap was laid for you, and, in spite of all your skill and caution, you tumbled right into it."

A troubled look appeared in the eyes of both Claverhouse and Yellow Tommy, for this was the first intimation they had received, that their arrest was not the result of an unfortunate accident.

"Who am I accused of robbing?" Claverhouse demanded.

"A dozen robberies, at least, Claverhouse, are scored to your credit and to-day you held up Miss Davenport at the Cross Keys Ranch, and lifted fifteen bags of coin."

"Oh, well, there is no use of a man saying anything, when such a monstrous charge as that is made," the rancher uttered as if in contempt.

"No; the least said, the less lies you'll have to swallow," the sheriff retorted, "and now I think I will take a look and see what you have in your saddle-pouch."

"Really, sheriff, I have a few little private matters in them, which I would rather not exhibit to the world."

"Exactly! Them are the things I'm after, I reckon," Peters responded with a grin.

The examination of the saddle-pouches revealed the disguises of the band; also four bags of coin which had been taken from the plundered hack.

"Can't say much when we show ye these articles, can ye, Claverhouse? You're an innocent—oh yes!"

And the manacles were snapped on their wrists.

The two culprits had no further use for words.

The party now started for Red Water City, which was reached, in due time.

But these two were not the first prisoners to arrive. Six more of the band had already been brought in, and placed in the calaboose.

The town was wild with excitement when the sheriff arrived with his prisoners, for this completed the number of the band.

Eight outlaws had attacked the hack—eight outlaws had been captured with their disguises, and the stolen coin was found in their possession.

A clearer case the sheriff could not have had against the gang, of whose existence no one had dreamed—much less that the English gentleman-born was the genius who had organized and led the thieves.

All the credit of the capture was given to Jim Peters, for the Pinkertons were content to keep in the background, and allow their share of the matter to remain quiet.

The men who were to pay the reward, though, understood who it was that had arranged the clever scheme which had resulted in the capture of the entire outlaw band.

And, needless to say, the people of Red Water City were profoundly amazed when they discovered who the outlaws were—that every one of the scoundrels were well-known men, who resided in the town or its immediate vicinity.

"No wonder that we didn't catch the rascals before," said one gray-haired citizen, "when they were right at our elbows. Why, I would as soon have thought of picking out my next door neighbor for one of the rogues as to think of that blacksmith who has always seemed to be one of the squarest kind of fellows."

Red Water City boasted of having quite an extensive calaboose. It had a large outer apartment, from which a dozen cells led, so that they were able to accommodate each one of the prisoners with a separate lock-up.

After getting his captures safely disposed of, the sheriff held a conference with the Pinkertons; then he proceeded to try the old game which all officials attempt to work—to get the criminal to confess.

He began with the outlaw captain.

When the jailer introduced Peters into Claverhouse's cell the Englishman was lying on his cot, and as he half rose, the sheriff hastened to say:

"Don't get up, my dear fellow, for I will take the stool by your side, and we can talk much more comfortably."

Claverhouse sunk back on his cot again, while Jim took the stool and sat down by his head.

"You know that you are in an awful bad box?"

"Yes, I am aware that I am in for it—that I am sure of being convicted."

"But, Peters, old man, there isn't any use to weep or wail or gnash my teeth. I counted all the chances before I went into it, and now that I am tripped up, I calculate to face the music like a man."

The sheriff assumed a confidential manner.

"I have been thinking," he said, "that there might be a chance to help you out a little."

"I am just the man to jump at such a thing," the prisoner confessed, brightening up.

"Well, we have got you eight men dead to rights on this last robbery, and can send you to State's Prison for a mighty long term for it without any trouble, but we haven't been able to get any well-defined clues to the other robberies."

"What other robberies?" asked the prisoner, apparently much surprised.

"Why, the attack on the Express train, the robbery of old man Solomons, and the stealing of the Silver Mountain Mine money."

"Great heavens! It isn't possible that you hold us responsible for all these crimes?"

and the Englishman sat bolt upright, and stared at the sheriff.

Jim Peters was annoyed, for he thought that Claverhouse was making game of him.

"Of course you did the jobs, and you are only wasting time in trying to deny it, to me, for I know better."

"Now, then, there are certain things that we want to get at in connection with these other robberies, and if you can arrange the matter so as to give us any information, the authorities will let up on you, so that your punishment will not be so severe; that I can safely promise."

"Oh, no; I can't do anything for you," Claverhouse returned, with an indifferent air as he stretched himself out again.

Peters was angered and disappointed.

"You are mighty unwise not to accept my offer."

"A man can't give you information which he does not possess."

"That is all bosh!" the sheriff declared.

"You can do the trick if you want to."

"Not by a jugful!" the prisoner responded, in a good-natured way.

"Just as you please then; but the chances are that we can get at the thing without the aid of any of you," the sheriff asserted defiantly.

"You are fortunately situated," Claverhouse sneered.

"I am going out to your ranch to-morrow, with a good body of men, and I'm going to search the house from the top to the bottom! and the chances are big that, hidden away in some well-covered hiding-place, I will find all the proof I want; I'll tear the house down, board by board, if necessary."

Claverhouse laughed.

"If you do, why you have got me foul and no mistake; but, I am willing to bet you a hundred dollars to fifty that you will not find, on my ranch, a single trace of anything unlawful, or that can criminate me."

"We will see," retorted the officer, and then he departed.

Jim Peters tried the game with each prisoner, and each gave him the same answer.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A WOMAN TO THE RESCUE.

A GIANT-SORT of fellow named Jake Gilligan was the keeper of the calaboose; he with an assistant, ran the concern.

On the night of the day that witnessed the capture of the outlaws, Jake sat in the outer apartment smoking a pipe.

It was after nine o'clock, and everything had been made secure for the night.

The way Jake and his assistant arranged their watch, each one took three hours on and three off.

Jake was on now until twelve o'clock.

He was about half asleep, when there came a sharp rap at the door.

"Now, then, what does this mean? Does any fool think that he can get in here at this time of night?" grumbled the jailer as he rose from his seat and approached the portal.

He opened the slide in the heavy door.

The tall figure of a woman, dressed in dark clothes, and closely veiled stood outside.

The jailer was astonished.

"I want to see Mr. Claverhouse," this woman demanded in almost imperious tones. It was Katherine Montrose.

As the jailer was a constant patron of the Keno Palace, he recognized the bright particular star of that institution immediately.

"Why, Miss Montrose, I am afraid this hyer thing ain't possible."

"Why not?"

"'Cos the sheriff has given orders that nobody is to be allowed to see the prisoners."

"Oh, that doesn't apply to an old friend like myself; besides he means the men. If he had any idea that I wanted to see Mr. Claverhouse, I know he would be glad to give permission."

"Here, take this!" and she tendered the jailer a ten-dollar bill. "I want to try to console the man a bit, for he thinks a great deal of me, you know. Nobody need know anything about this call, for, if you don't tell I certainly will not; nor will Mr. Claverhouse, I'll promise you that."

Now ten dollar notes don't grow on every bush, and the opportunities to secure "saw-bucks," which came in the way of the jailer, were so few and far between, that he felt he could not lose a good chance to pocket one, and at the same time do the lady a polite favor.

"Well, no, I don't reckon there can be much harm done," and the jailer at once threw back the bolts and permitted the lady to enter, closing the door softly behind her.

"The main point is to keep quiet!" he warned, and proceeding in advance led the visitor to the cell of Claverhouse.

The keeper unlocked the door, opened it, stuck his head in, saying, in a low voice:

"A lady to see you, mister; and talk low."

Miss Montrose advanced into the cell, when the door was noiselessly closed after her.

There was a powerful kerosene lamp hanging from the ceiling of the outer apartment, and as there was a large, grated window high up in the door of each cell, the one light illuminated all of the cells.

Claverhouse was extended at full length on his cot, but immediately rose to a sitting posture, as the lady entered.

"This is a surprise indeed!" he exclaimed.

"You are in trouble, and I came to see if I could help you," she declared as she seated herself on the stool beside the cot.

"I am very much obliged to you for your kindness, but I'm afraid you will not be able to do anything for me."

"The accusation is true then? You are one of this outlaw gang?"

"It is worse than that, Katherine: I am not only one of the outlaws, but I am the captain of the band—the man who planned all the robberies. The others were but tools who carried out my schemes."

"In this Cross Keys Ranch affair I was caught red-handed, but I think it will be a difficult matter for them to prove that any of us had anything to do with the other robberies."

"That is fortunate!" the lady exclaimed.

"Really, it does not amount to much, for the evidence in this case will suffice to send us to State's Prison for twenty years apiece."

"Oh, isn't that horrible!"

"It isn't a pleasant prospect to contemplate, for twenty years is almost a measure of a man's life, at my age."

"Oh, Claverhouse, how could you go into such a scheme as this?" Katherine Montrose cried. "You surely must have been mad!"

"No, no more mad than the average business man, who takes desperate risks whenever he is hard pushed by fortune," the prisoner replied.

"Let me explain to you how I was persuaded to go into the unlawful enterprise," he continued, as if anxious to extenuate his act, to her.

"I was badly pushed for money, and knew not which way to turn. If I could not raise a certain amount by a certain time, my ranch and all I owned in the world was gone."

"When I was thus situated, an Englishman came along—an old acquaintance. His name was Thomas Hodkins, and in my flush days, when I had plenty of money, in England, this man had been my valet."

"He proved to be light-fingered, though, and one day ran off with my cash."

"Through the newspapers I afterward learned that he had developed into a first-class crook, known to the Scotland Yard men as Yellow Tommy, and reputed by them to be one of the most skillful rascals in the kingdom."

"Strange as it may appear, I was glad to see the man, for he seemed to me like a messenger from home."

"Having heard that I was being pushed to the wall by my creditors, and was likely to smash all up, he had sought me out to propose a scheme by means of which I might avoid ruin."

"It was this outlaw game, and in my desperation I went into it. Tommy had been doing a little in that line, and had the nucleus of the band he proposed."

"Now, Katherine, that is the way I got into the scrape—that is just why I took to the hold-up game."

"I got along splendidly for a while, I planned all the robberies with extreme caution, and succeeded in completely baffling

the authorities; but as I now know to my sorrow there were thief-takers who were smarter than I."

"They laid a trap, and caught me without any trouble. The bait was a treasure-coach, which I had confidently arranged to attack at a certain point, and, having secured the gold bags, expected to safely retreat through a long belt of timber and return to my ranch with no chance of detection. But, as you have heard—a powerful posse—an armed force of a hundred men, were on the wait, so the very moment we went into the woods, we were really prisoners."

"Yes, it was a cunning snare," and Miss Montrose reflected for a few moments, in silence.

"Is your conviction certain?" she asked at last.

"I should say it was; I don't stand one chance in a thousand to escape, with such evidence as will be produced."

"A good lawyer couldn't pull you through?"

"No; a dozen of them wouldn't be of any use."

"But, something must be done, Mr. Claverhouse!" the woman declared; "I will never consent that you shall go to State's Prison."

A look of hope came into the eyes of the Englishman.

"If plenty of money were used, it might be possible to effect my escape from this jail," he said, eagerly.

Katherine Montrose shook her head.

"I think you are wrong about that. I don't believe money will do much good in this situation."

"I bought my way in with a ten-dollar note, to-night, but the jailer did not want to allow me to see you. The ten dollars and the fact that no one would know anything of the matter, led him finally to consent."

"Don't you think that a big sum would persuade him to let me escape?"

"No, I do not. I don't believe ten thousand dollars would be any inducement."

"Possibly you are right," the prisoner assented, with a disappointed air.

"Whatever is to be done must be in the way of a ruse. The keeper must be fooled in some way."

The prisoner shook his head. "I fancy you will find that a difficult if not an impossible task."

"Nothing is impossible to the woman who dares," the lady firmly responded.

"Now I shall act; count on that; and be ready when I do act to do well your part," she adjured with much decision of tone and manner.

"Good-night! I will come again to-morrow," and she was soon gone.

CHAPTER XL.

A SURPRISE OCCURS.

THE citizens of Red Water City, on the morning of the day that succeeded the one upon which the capture of the outlaws occurred, got up earlier than usual—not to attend to their business, not to look after their affairs, but simply to talk over this wonderful event which had occurred.

They were not only surprised but dazed by this outlaw gang business. That their old acquaintances, their neighbors, should be the ones to play the rascal was astounding.

The sheriff was riding on the topmost wave of popularity. The universal opinion was expressed that there wasn't a sheriff in Arizona who could hold a candle to him.

But, how evanescent is human popularity! How fleeting and fickle is the opinion of the multitude!

The Red Water City calaboose was a new building and a strong one, built in the modern style, and provided with all modern improvements.

No prisoner had ever yet succeeded in getting out of it, and the sheriff was anxious that none of his should be the first to succeed in breaking jail, or in being taken out of it by a lynch mob; so, in conference with the mayor it was decided that no visitors whatever should be permitted to see the prisoners, or to confer with them. The eight men were to be kept in solitary confinement.

The announcement of this determination, that morning, started a "ruction"—raised a storm of disapproval that fairly astounded the two officials, and from being the most popular man in the town the sheriff became the most unpopular.

The citizens were furious to be denied the privilege both of visiting the jail and of interviewing the prisoners, both from curiosity and to get information, for the idea, somehow, got abroad that there might be other citizens who were involved with the Claverhouse gang, and if so, it was their right to see and "pump" those who had been so cleverly entrapped.

Little by little this excitement increased until it culminated in the appointment of a committee to visit the sheriff and mayor, and protest against their order of exclusion, and to assert the right of the people to enter the jail and confer with the prisoners without restraint.

This committee consisted of Colonel Daniel Boone, of the Rising Sun Hotel, and Isaac Solomons, the old Jew storekeeper, both of whom "had their mad up" to a white heat.

The committee found the sheriff with the mayor, in the latter's office, and Boone proceeded to explain their mission.

"Mr. Sheriff and Mr. Mayor, this gentleman and myself came as a committee representing the best citizens of Red Water City. We ain't the men, you understand, to kick against any regular authority, unless there is a good and sufficient reason for it; but, as representing the best citizens of Red Water City, we do protest against this jail order of yours!"

The sheriff had anticipated no trouble about the order, much less had he looked for any uprising of this kind, so at first he was inclined to be indifferent to the protest.

He drew himself up stiffly.

"Colonel Boone, while I have the highest respect for my fellow-citizens of Red Water City, I reckon I can't allow them to instruct me in regard to my official duties as sheriff."

"Those prisoners are in my charge; I am responsible for their safe keeping; and in sworn execution of my office as sheriff, I am bound to take every precaution."

"That is all right, but because you are sheriff it don't go to show that you have any right to set yourself up for a little tin god on wheels—as judge, jury and executioner."

"By what right do you, as sheriff, doom these men to solitary confinement, while they are in our calaboose? They are not accused of murder, are they?" and the frate man shook his finger with all the majesty of a supreme court judge.

The sheriff was staggered; this particular aspect of the affair had not occurred to him before.

He saw he had exceeded his powers, that he could not legally enforce the order which he had given.

The mayor, seeing the dilemma, hastened to the sheriff's assistance.

"The fact is, Boone, Peters and myself may have been over-anxious, in the matter, but we can fix it without further trouble. You can bet your life neither Peters nor myself are going to run contrary to the will of the people of Red Water City if we know it, and certainly not take the law into our hands."

"Now you're talking hard horse-sense!" the colonel declared.

"Just turn the thing over in your mind! These men are in jail accused of a common crime, but they have not yet been convicted, and the man doesn't live who can be certain that they will be convicted no matter how black the case may seem to be against them."

"They are entitled to the counsel and sympathy of their friends and neighbors, and it would be the height of injustice to deny them this poor privilege—this legal right, I may say."

"Oh, well, I'll rescind that order, as you all seem so opposed to it. I'll put a double guard around the jail and then, under proper conditions, will allow all who care to, to see the prisoners."

"That was right," old Solomons chimed in, for the first time taking part in the conversation. "I myself, have a strong reason for wishing to talk to these men. They robbed me, and now that they are in jail, maybe

some one of them will tell me something about my monish."

"All right, then; you can interview them as much as you please," assured the sheriff, and the committee took its departure.

When the announcement was made that the sheriff had backed down, the excitement subsided, and Jim Peters had regained his popularity.

There were eight prisoners in the jail, and as from twenty to thirty people wanted to see each prisoner, the jailers had their hands full from the time the first visitors were admitted.

Precautions were taken against escapes, and unless a man could show that he had good reason for wishing to see one of the prisoners he was not admitted into the cell, but was forced to converse with the accused through the grated window.

Claverhouse would not receive any visitors.

"I'm not going to talk with a lot of people just to satisfy their curiosity!" he declared; but added, after a moment's reflection:

"I will make an exception in favor of Miss Katherine Montrose. If she comes I will be glad to see her."

The reason of which all will understand; but, would the lady see her now disgraced suitor?

The day passed; the sun went down, and the light began to soften.

"Jest a half an hour more of these blamed visitors," Jake Gilligan, the keeper declared; "and you can bet your life I will not be sorry when this visiting and palaver come to an end."

At this point Miss Katherine Montrose made her appearance.

"I did not intend to come to see Mr. Claverhouse to-day, for I thought he would have so many visitors that I might be in the way; but now, as the time is approaching to lock up for the night, I thought it would do no harm to come and cheer him up a little."

"Right you are, ma'am; I don't doubt he will be glad to see you, but as for the other visitors, he wouldn't have 'em, so no one has been admitted to see him, to-day. He left orders, though, that an exception was to be made in your favor."

The lady was then admitted into the cell.

Owing to the number of strangers still in the jail corridor and outer rooms, she had come closely veiled, and wore a dark cloak, which almost completely hid her person.

She only remained about ten minutes; then she signaled for the jailer to let her out.

As he did so, she pressed a ten-dollar bill into his hand, much to his delight.

There were fifteen or twenty people in the outer apartment—the sheriff and his associates, and the friends of the prisoners.

Everybody knew Katherine Montrose, and all nodded respectfully to her as she glided out of the corridor and passed to the outer door of the jail.

Another half hour and the visiting time ceased. The visitors retreated, and the jail assumed its normal condition, with Jake Gilligan and his assistant in charge.

When the supper-hour came the jailers served the meal, a bowl of coffee and a big chunk of bread.

Claverhouse was, apparently, sound asleep on his cot, so the jailers did not waken him; but placed his supper just inside the door.

At nine o'clock Gilligan made the rounds for the night.

About all the prisoners were sound asleep. The jailer made everything secure, and then sought his easy-chair and his tobacco.

But, was all right?

CHAPTER XLI.

A REVELATION.

At six in the morning the jail was astir. Coffee and bread were brought in, and the jailers proceeded to dole it out.

A surprise awaited them at the very first cell.

When they opened the door instead of being greeted by the sight of the rancher, Claverhouse, they beheld Katherine Montrose.

She sat on the edge of the bed, attired in a

plain house-dress, and greeted them with a smiling face.

"Good-morning!" she said in the pleasantest and most matter-of-fact way.

The jailers were astounded.

For a moment they stared, and then Gilligan cried:

"What on earth has become of Claverhouse?"

"He took a walk in my place yesterday afternoon," the lady replied.

"By the eternal hills! there'll be thunder and lightning to pay for this here thing!" the jailer exclaimed, frantically.

Intelligence of this new surprise was at once sent to the sheriff, and Jim Peters, together with the mayor, came in hot haste to the jail.

They immediately proceeded to the cell and entered, the lady greeting them with a smile.

The sheriff was "mad" all through.

"See hyer, you Montrose woman, don't you know that you've got yourself into an awful bad box by going into this hyer thing?"

"No, I don't!" the lady retorted defiantly. "It was simply my wit against yours. A friend of mine was in a bad way; I helped him out, and that is all there is to it!"

"I will show you before we get through with this matter, that you can be punished mighty severely for what you have done."

"I am in your power and am willing to accept any punishment which may be legally meted out to me," Katherine assured, with the resignation of a martyr.

"There is only one chance for you," the sheriff declared. "If you can give us some information so we can get on his track, maybe I can get the authorities to let up a little on you."

"I know absolutely nothing about it. I told the man I thought I could contrive his escape."

"He jumped at the chance, of course, but when I parted with him I did not ask him a single question. So, whether he has gone to the East or West, to the North or South, I know not, and really do not care. I did a friend's part, and would do it again under the same circumstances."

"They saw that it was useless to waste time with her, so they hurried into the street and promulgated the news of the escape."

The citizens were in a fever of excitement at once, and at first the opinion was general that the fugitive would be speedily recaptured.

But when it was considered that he had twelve hours' start, and the measures for his escape had been taken so well, that no man saw him go, or knew which way he went, the shrewd calculators came to the conclusion that, unless he made some big blunder, Claverhouse would not be retaken.

After setting on foot all the machinery in his power, looking to the pursuit of the outlaw, the sheriff made his way to the hotel.

In one of the apartments sat Robert Pinkerton, his superintendent, Richard Ingersoll, and Miss Diana Davenport.

The sheriff told the story of the escape, and then an extremely strange thing took place.

Miss Diana Davenport sprang to her feet, and swore for a few moments like a trooper!

"Jim Peters, I thought you had more sense! To think that after all my trouble in capturing this artful scoundrel, you, with your stupid donkeys at the jail, have contrived to let him slip through your fingers!"

"By the Lord! it's enough to make a man swear never to have anything more to do with sheriffs."

Strange language this to come from a young lady's lips.

But, this young lady was no young lady. It was Edmund Gloster, the shrewdest detective that the Pinkertons had in their employ!

It was Gloster who played the part of the peddler Jerry Green, and when he found that he had accomplished all he could, in that character, he transformed himself into a dashing young woman, and it must be admitted that he played the role to perfection.

Gloster, of course, was terribly disappointed by the escape of the Englishman, and as there were a dozen of the Pinkerton

detectives in the neighborhood, in various disguises, he summoned them and they set out on a hunt for the fugitive.

Of course the reader understands that the veteran detective abandoned the character of Miss Diana Davenport before he set out on his new enterprise.

Gloster was a skillful fellow; the Pinkerton men were the best of detectives, but for all that they couldn't accomplish impossibilities.

The Englishman was a magnificent rider, used to spending days in the saddle; he had a splendid horse, a complete disguise, and twelve hours' start.

If the sleuth-hounds could have got on his track, then indeed, with their untiring patience, they might have been able to accomplish something; but, as they could not obtain the slightest clue as to where the man had gone, it was an utter impossibility for them to do anything.

Needless to say, none of the rest of the outlaws got away. The sheriff and the jailers had their eyes wide enough open, after the Claverhouse episode, to make the calaboose a sure enough lock-up.

The mayor and sheriff were in a quandary: what to do with Katherine Montrose, was the question.

They wanted to punish her, but they did not exactly see their way clear to do so.

There was a deal of sympathy for her and of admiration for the bold part the girl had played; and finally, so strong a pressure was brought to bear upon the officials that they concluded to release the woman, which they did.

Katherine Montrose returned to her place in the Keno Palace, and her first evening was a regular ovation.

Everybody wanted to shake hands with her and compliment her upon the pluck which she had displayed.

The New Yorker, Vandermiller, accompanied by his faithful companion, Hickory Bill Jackson, hovered on the verge of the crowd like an unquiet spirit.

Not until half past eleven, when the crowd had about all gone, did he venture to speak to the woman.

"I suppose this little episode settles my chances?" he said in a rueful way.

"From the fact that you went to all this trouble on behalf of the Englishman, it seems to prove to me that you care far more for him than you do for anybody else."

"Not at all; and this is just where you men make such fearful mistakes. He needed the aid of a friend, and I gave it to him. If I had been in love with the man I would have been a partner in his flight."

"Then the field is still open?" Vandermiller exclaimed.

"Yes, but it is no use for you or anybody else to enter, and if you are wise, you and the rest will be satisfied to take no for an answer. I shall not marry again."

This was conclusive enough, and Vandermiller accepted it as a final reply.

In due time the sheriff turned his prisoners over to the rightful authorities, and they were brought to trial for their crime.

Each and every man was convicted, and got twenty years in State's Prison at hard labor.

The career of guilt may seem to be an alluring pathway, but he who travels it long enough never fails to meet destruction in some fearful pitfall.

Edmund Gloster's professional pride had never been so wounded as by the escape of the Englishman.

He gave up all other business, and devoted himself to seeking clues to Claverhouse's whereabouts; but it was a vain quest.

The outlaw did not deem it wise to tarry in America. When he left Red Water City, he proceeded east in as direct a line as he dared to pursue.

Of course, as soon as he came in reach of the iron horse, it did not take him many hours to hide himself in the midst of civilization.

He had cached his money in a secure place in the neighborhood of his ranch, and had taken the precaution to have all the funds in paper money, so he would be able to carry a small fortune without trouble.

This wealth he of course secured before he fled.

In due time he reached the great city by the sea, and there took ship to Europe.

Hidden away among the Old World civilization, he could laugh to scorn all attempts to capture him, on the part of the matchless Arizona Detective.

THE END.

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